I Miss You

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/16633508.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Charlie Countryman (2013), Blood and Chocolate (2007), Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Aiden (Blood and Chocolate)/Nigel (Charlie Countryman)
Characters:	Aiden (Blood and Chocolate), Nigel (Charlie Countryman), Gabi Ibanescu, Vivian Gandillon, Jack Crawford, Alana Bloom, Bella Crawford
Additional Tags:	Hannibal Extended Universe, Trans Male Character, Past Drug Use, past break up, past nigel/gabi, Angst with a Happy Ending, inappropriate messaging, Developing Friendships, Please see chapter 1 note for info on future tags/triggers/squicks, renewing friendships, Masturbation, Time Skips, Memories, Dysphoria, Phone Calls & Telephones, Misunderstandings, Reunions, Gay Bar, Nervousness, processing some mind blowing information basically, Anger, Minor Violence, feelings of betrayal, Blood, Trans Female Character, Acceptance, hurtful thoughts, Heart-to-Heart, ch7 is the turning point, Nigel is trying to get his head around all this, but he really is trying!, Dating, Nigel plans a date, CW: guns and shooting of guns, Second Date, back to the gay bar, leather daddies, Flirting, Kissing, Dancing, Self-Doubt, Phone Sex, a little bit of gay panic... sort of, ruminations on the art of cock sucking, performance anxiety, Relationship Advice, Fluid Sexuality, Awkward Conversations, trans pornos, like a virgin, Insecurity, Oral Sex, front hole penetration, Rough Sex, lots of feels, Hand Jobs, Nigel's new found kink for facial hair, the blow job Nigel/we've all been waiting for, oral sex on a trans guy, front hole fingering, Happy Ending, (but also a cliffhanger... kinda...), Podfic Welcome, do not copy to another site
Language:	English
Series:	Part 20 of Non Cis Fics, Part 81 of Tiger's Mads x Hugh Rare Pair fics, Part 1 of Miss You/Love You
Stats:	Published: 2018-11-15 Completed: 2019-04-11 Words: 42,524 Chapters: 15/15

I Miss You

by TigerPrawn

Summary

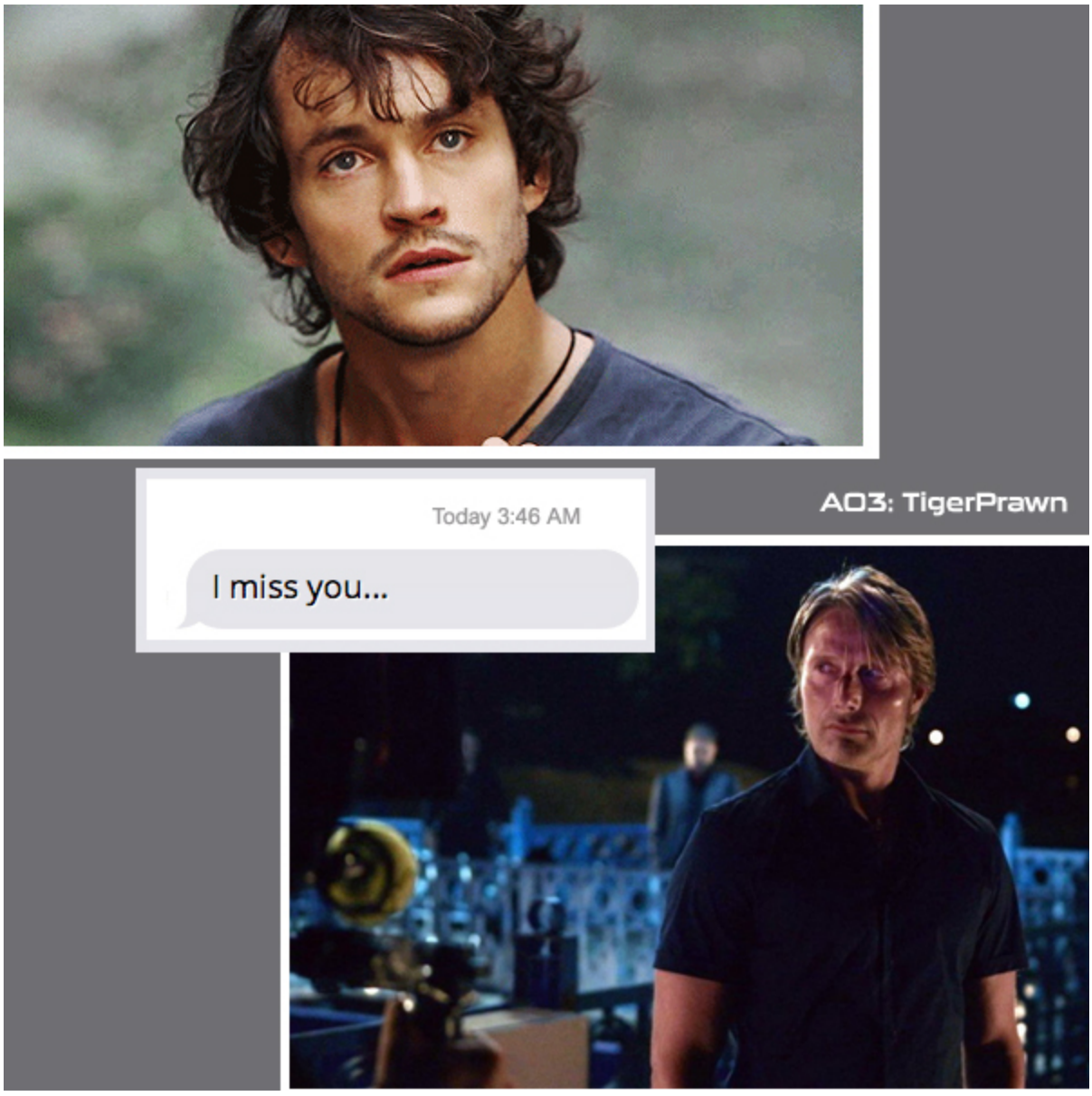
Five years after their divorce, Nigel receives a drunken message from the once love of his life throwing everything into turmoil.

(This is completely AU but draws on elements of the source movies, especially Charlie Countryman)

Notes

Ok, so... this story really has come about from my own need to therapise myself through some shit. There will be angst, but not loads and it will be resolved. But just as a heads up should it be an issue for any readers - the explicit rating is for future chapters with sex between a trans guy and a cis guy and will include front hole oral and penetrative sex. This is, so far, pretty much contained to one chapter as the chapters are so short, so can potentially be skipped over if it is an issue but you wanted to read anyway. On an emotional level - things do get quite raw. There isn't out and out transphobia but definitely some ignorance - one specific chapter has a very raw argument with a lot of stuff that needs to be aired out between the characters relating to Aiden's transition but not actually transphobic. Please make note if this might be something you would be uncomfortable reading. I will be updating the tags as I post each chapter, but I will also be leaving a beginning note on any chapters that have things that might be pertinent and could be triggers. As always, if you feel I haven't tagged something that I should, please let me know! I am a trans guy, but obviously all our squicks, triggers and dysphoria varies, so there is every chance I have not tagged or mistagged something that might be an issue for others but isn't for me and I haven't realised it -so please do let me know if that is the case!

Chapter 1



~I miss you

He let out a short sob and passed out.

*

Nigel stretched out in his bed, a slight hangover threatening to descend as he blinked his eyes open. Light was streaming into his room from the window he'd forgotten to draw the curtains on the night before.

He'd barely had anything to drink, rarely drank these days at all, and he should have known better than to have the red wine. That always sat badly with him, but it was what his date had ordered and he was being polite. And maybe also in need of some numbing from the experience.

The whole evening had been a fucking struggle.

He was doing much better since he'd stopped using drugs - stopped dealing and stopped taking them. But sometimes having a drink was something he allowed, even though he knew he shouldn't.

He'd hit rock bottom after Gabi left, and then he'd started to claw his way back up, and getting clean was the only way he was going to survive. A couple of glasses of wine weren't going to set him back.

Nigel huffed as he pulled himself from the bed and into the shower. Figured his mind would go to Gabi, it so often did. It had been over five years and yet there was still that niggle in the back of his mind. What if things had been different? What if he could have been the man she had needed back then? If he'd got clean sooner…

It didn't matter now. She'd left, and really he couldn't blame her for that.

And now, third date in the last year, and he couldn't imagine ever meeting anyone who would replace her. Susan had been pleasant, and she was incredibly attractive, but she wasn't Gabi. There wasn't that instant connection he'd enjoyed with her - that swell, that ache, in his chest. She had been the love of his life, and he'd known it the moment he met her. He'd been a fucking idiot to let her go.

He let the water run over him and started to feel less grotty. By the time Nigel wrapped the towel around his waist and went back to his bedroom, he had started the usual mental process of trying to supress all thoughts and feelings in regards to his ex wife.

When Nigel went to grab his underwear from his bedside drawers, he noticed his phone was flashing, a message alert had come in whilst he slept.

The number seemed familiar, though he couldn't quite recall it, not until he read the message.

~I miss you

Gabi.

Fucking Gabi.

His heart thundered in his chest and he felt sick. Nothing, not a single thing from her since the divorce. He had deleted her from his phone in a fit of rage back then, but the familiarity of the number lingered in his brain and now came into sharp focus.

Nigel's hands shook and his palms were sweaty. The trembling began to radiate out through his body.

He'd been trying for years to get over her and was coming to the realisation he never would. No one else would ever be Gabi, his beloved wife. Who was now sending this. It felt both wonderful and cruel.

Nigel's breath came out shaky and he realised he was gripping the phone so tight his knuckles had turned white. There was something lodged in his chest, an emotion he couldn't quite unravel. He practically stumbled to the bed and sat, dropping the phone next to him and burying his head in his hands.

*

Aiden woke with a splitting skull. He couldn't believe how much he'd drunk at Vivian's wedding. It had started jovially enough, but after a while it stopped being fun and he had started to spiral. It had been so long since he'd done anything like that, perhaps it was attending a wedding that had set him off?

He had, at least, excused himself as soon as he started to realise quite how drunk he was. But then he'd gone back to his hotel room and continued to drink until he forgot.

He'd drank through the memories of his own perfect wedding day, of the one relationship he'd been sure of - thought that it really would be "til death do us part". He'd kept drinking until he couldn't remember any more. He drank until he blacked out.

And now he woke, half hanging off of the hotel bed, a small pool of vomit on the carpet beneath. He groaned and rolled onto his back, the motion making him feel sick.

His eyes and throat felt raw and he knew he must have cried a great deal more than he'd assumed he had. Aiden let out a heavy sigh and squeezed his eyes shut. The heavy curtains kept the room dark other than the warm glow around the side of the curtains. It was probably already the afternoon, Aiden knew.

He tried to roll again, tried to get up, but the movement made his stomach lurch and he aborted the motion. His new position left a hard pain in his side that he managed to shift slightly to relieve - pulling his phone out from beneath him.

It was flashing. The preview of the message displayed on the lock screen.

~It's been a long time darling

Aiden knew who it was before he even focused in on the name of the sender. He wanted to cry out with the stab of anguish he felt, but instead he vomited over the side of the bed.

*

It had taken Nigel hours to get up the nerve to reply to Gabi. Hours of anguish as he reeled from refreshed pain at their parting through to elation that she contacted him. Even the elation was dampened by further pain at it having been a mistake. She'd meant to message someone else - maybe a new husband. He was sure, at least, that it wasn't her being cruel - Gabi had never been cruel. No, he'd been the asshole.

Took her for granted, never listened to her. Was high off his fucking tits half the time they'd been together. He couldn't blame her for leaving. Things changed between them, he'd suspected she was fucking around but she'd denied it, told him he didn't listen and could never understand. She'd been right. Maybe if he hadn't been high or so preoccupied with the club?

And the worst of it was, she'd tried so hard to help him. To stop him using so much, then to help him get clean. But he didn't want to be helped back then, not until she said she was leaving and then it was too late.

The pain of that last conversation, the day she walked out, stabbed him in the chest.

I can't do this anymore.

His fingers had trembled as he tapped out several replies only to delete them. He considered not replying at all - if it was a mistake he should leave her be.

But he had to know. He couldn't ignore the contact - like a life line thrown out to a drowning man. He had to grasp it with both hands and hold on for dear life. Like the fucking asshole he was.

Some of the replies had been long, asking how she was, where she was, what she was doing. Too intrusive. Many had been begging, pleading her to… to something. He wasn't sure what. To turn back time and not leave him. To meet with him. To, at the least, continue this line of communication that she had opened, even if it had been a mistake.

He threw his phone down on the bed several times. Stalked the room until he had to escape. Chain smoked on the front stoop as his neighbour glared at him.

Then finally, finally, he tapped out a simple reply. No deep thoughts and feelings, just something to keep the communication open. Nothing to scare her off, just a statement of fact.

~It's been a long time darling

Nigel pressed send and then let an anguished cry escape him. He missed her so much, his beautiful Gabi. If she'd just text him now and then, if that was the most this would be then he'd take it and be happy.

*

It felt like he'd been staring at the message for hours. Maybe he had?

Aiden had managed a shower, though every moment of it was consumed with memories of his ex, of the intense and terrifying love they'd shared, of the seemingly inevitable ending and sense of loss that followed. The weight of how hard it had all been crushed his chest and made it hard to breath.

It had been years since he'd had the sort of anxiety that was starting to course through him at the thought of it all. At the memories and at the searing agony of his own stupidity. How the fuck did he manage to send that message? So drunk that he could only vaguely remember

doing it. So drunk that the little part of him that never wanted to lose touch and definitively end it all, took control and did the one thing he should never have done, for both their sakes.

Aiden pulled the faucet around to cold and hit himself with the blast of freezing water before slamming the water off and standing there shaking. He realised that some of the moisture on his face was from tears and his throat felt raw again. A small, anguished cry escaped him and he shook - a combination of alcohol coursing through his blood like poison, and overwhelming emotion doing much the same to his heart. It made him want to drop to his knees and scream. Instead he took a few deep breaths and reached for the towel. Remaining composed long enough to get back to his bed and let himself sit there, trembling in the towel he had wrapped around him like and blanket.

When he'd opened the message earlier he could see that the first in the conversation had been his own. He looked at it again now, as though doing so would reveal something - hold some answer to the question ‘how the fuck could I be so stupid?’. But it didn’t.

Aiden lost count of how long he’d been glaring at it when another message popped in, this time from Vivian.

~We'll be checking out in an hour to get to the airport. Will we see you before we fly? You seemed pretty wasted last night.

He wanted to apologise to her for that. But instead, like a selfish asshole, he tapped out

~I sent Nigel a text last night

Within seconds his phone rang, flashing up her name. He hesitated before answering, knowing he was as likely to get a reprimand as he was sympathy.

“Why do you still even have his number?” Viv began as soon as he picked up the phone.

“I just…” his voice was raw and he heard a soft sigh on the end of the line, “I couldn’t delete it. I didn’t ever plan to use it, I always assumed he’d have changed numbers by now even, but… I just… I couldn’t delete it. If I did then it would be over, it would be…” Aiden couldn’t hold back the tears, his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath.

“Aiden I’m on my way, okay? I’ll be-”

“No, please Viv, it’s fine,” he forced himself to breath, taking deep breaths and tramping down the emotions that threatened to overwhelm him. “Please go on your honeymoon, don’t worry about it. He probably won’t even reply.”

The lie made his cheeks burn and he was glad they were talking over the phone and not face to face. She’d have known it in a heartbeat.

“It’s… it’s okay, I get it baby. He was a big part of your life, and I know you wish it had all gone differently but… he’s trouble. And… I just, I want you to be safe, okay?” Her voice was gentle, coaxing. He knew exactly what she was driving at and had nothing to say in response.

“I will be, I’m fine.” He sniffed and dried his eyes, “honestly, I was just being drunk and stupid,” he let out a light chuckle. “Go have a great time and make sure you bring me back a shitty fridge magnet or something.’

She laughed then, clearly relieved and reassured, “Of course!”

“Go catch your flight.” Aiden urged, softly.

“I will, and… Aiden, baby, don’t do anything stupid, okay?”

His jaw clenched tight and a lump rose in his throat.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The messaging continues as does the renewal of Aiden and Nigel's friendship... If they can manage "just friends" of course...

Chapter Notes

FYI - I never really directly refer to the fact that Aiden was Gabi and has transitioned, because it doesn't feel right to address it head on like that. Also, apologies for any confusion, but although Nigel refers to Gabi (she/her) in their passed (this is because to Nigel's mind (at this point), he's still talking to Gabi), Aiden refers to his past self as Aiden (he/him) even pre transition. This is because this is how he is comfortable with considering and addressing it.

There was nothing for days. For three days and eight hours there was nothing. Until -

~How have you been?

Nigel was sat at the table in his little apartment, eating some leftovers, when his phone beeped. He tried to tell himself that it could be one of his few friends, or most likely his boss asking him to change around some of his shifts. He'd been telling himself that for days and yet every time the alert sounded, his heart was in his throat and his palms began to sweat as he wanted desperately for it to be Gabi again.

And this time it was.

After telling himself over and over that it was a mistake and he would never hear from her ever again, finally this time his hopes weren't dashed.

It was all too easy to answer quickly and desperately -

~Really good actually. I got clean a few years ago, no drugs. I joined a programme, I have a job in drug prevention if you can believe it :)

He regretted it the moment he sent it. He wanted her to know he was in a better place now, in the place she had always hoped he would be. And whilst he didn't want to scare her off by messaging something like 'the only thing missing is you', he regretted not mentioning her in someway.

The reply came back just as quickly and that made his heart pound.

~So happy to hear that Nigel. I'm glad you're well.

The words felt so final, so like the end of a conversation that he started to panic a little. He typed a response as quickly as his thumbs could hit the keypad -

~How about you darling? Are you doing alright?

He had to hazard that she might not be. After all why the fuck would she contact him if she were in her right mind after everything that had happened?

Maybe it was the wrong thing to ask. She didn't reply.

*

"I can't do this anymore."

Those were the last words he'd said to Nigel before walking out.

Nigel had been a little high - what he'd likely have termed *buzzed*, but not completely beyond comprehending. And he probably assumed it was because of the drugs, the job, all things he'd only ever been honest about. But it wasn't, it was about Aiden, he just knew Nigel was always a little too buzzed to have that conversation.

Nigel had been angry, smashed some things. He'd always did have a temper, though Aiden knew he'd never have hurt him. Not then anyway. Beyond that day? He just couldn't say. At one point he had known Nigel very well, they'd been in love - desperately so. But slowly they had checked out - Nigel's work became busier - more consuming, more dangerous. Things between them had slowly changed. No less love, but sometimes love wasn't enough.

Aiden liked to think that he hadn't changed. And in truth, he really hadn't. He was more himself now - still the same personality and likes and dislikes. But back then - their last year or so together - he had become withdrawn, miserable. That had been just as much at play in their growing apart as anything else.

They had met at the cafe that Aiden had been working at. A starving student at the local art college then. Nigel had been recovering from a brutal injury, and had spotted some of his sketches on the counter one day. He liked them, joked that Aiden should draw him 'like one of his French girls', and eventually Aiden had.

Those first few years when they'd been happy. He always knew that Nigel and his friend Darko had a side business dealing drugs out of the nightclub Darko owned. But the bigger that enterprise became, the more wayward Nigel grew. He had been home less and less, the dangerous edge that had attracted Aiden became more and more of him. And perhaps they could have weathered that if not for Aiden.

Something hadn't been quite right all his life, something Aiden hadn't been able to put his finger on but that had been there, viscerally, since puberty. But their sex life had been good and Nigel had been so accommodating of his little quirks and foibles, that it had remained an

afterthought. Something that wasn't quite right, but everything else was. He just assumed everyone felt this way about sex and their bodies and… It had hit him all at once. He had been graduated for a while, had a good job with a promotional agency - mostly providing art for local business and charity campaigns. It was reading the materials for a campaign for an LGBTQ+ charity - reading some of the testimonials and case studies - that made Aiden question a few things about himself. Made him start to wonder if indeed everyone did feel this way or was there really a different reason for it?

At some point he and Nigel diverged - Nigel consumed with work, Aiden with the questioning of his entire existence. And it was after that divergence that he really started to understand himself and who he was. Had things been different he might have shared that with Nigel. But instead it became a secret that ate at him until he couldn't take it anymore.

"I can't do this anymore."

He left Nigel and went to his best friend Vivian and told her everything he'd been keeping within himself for so long. It made it real and he knew then that it was right. He finally gave it a voice and made it real, and cried with relief.

Her opinion had been that Nigel might have taken the news poorly and maybe the break up had been for the best. Perhaps she was right? He had always wanted to give Nigel more credit than that, but he genuinely wasn't sure what the man's reaction would have been. And he hadn't had the emotional or mental strength at that point to find out - it had been easier to walk away. Start over on the other side of the city, new job, new life.

Texting all these years later, was an idiotic idea.

After a brief couple of messages a few days after the first, Aiden withdrew again. His vacation was over and he was back to his usual daily routine, and that hadn't included Nigel for quite some years.

Even so, thoughts of him weighed heavily on Aiden. Knowing that he was clean and even helping others with drug problems was something he hadn't ever considered. Aiden had reread the texts a few times, he could hear them in that same rumble that Nigel purred against his neck when they'd made love.

It would be so easy to reply - with platitudes, with the truth or with something in between. But he didn't. He was equally unable to force himself to delete the message chain, and perhaps even Nigel's number, once and for all. It held him in a limbo that he realised had been there, not quite as acutely, for the last five years.

The days stretched into a week and thoughts of Nigel increased rather than decreased. Different scenarios playing over in his head - what if he'd told him when they were still together? What if he'd told him four years ago? Three? After hormones started? After top surgery? Once he'd started to pass? All those times when he'd missed being able to tell Nigel - his best friend as well as lover - the ups and downs of each day.

Tonight Aiden had a bottle of wine with his dinner and curled into the sofa to cry. Mourning all the times that had never been.

He felt a gaping loss, not just of Nigel, but of the things he had wanted to share and experience with him. He had felt that loss keenly for years to the point where he hardly noticed it anymore. Every time a milestone was reached or a day turned bad. He'd wanted to share his joy when his hormone therapy started, and when he'd first started to see the results of it. He had wanted to celebrate with someone after his top surgery, have them help him through recovery instead of Viv, as much as he loved her. He had wanted Nigel to explore his changing body with his hands and mouth, wanted Nigel to make love to him with as much tender worship as he had when they were married.

These thoughts were so destructive. No good could ever come of a past neither of them could change. And the future?

Aiden picked up his phone and put it down again no less than six times before he grit his teeth and started tapping out a message.

~do tou think abou tthe future

He didn't realise how poorly his drunken digits had typed until after he pressed send, his eyes welling up once more.

The return message was swift.

~Darling, have you been drinking? I don't want to message when you're not sober and fully aware of what you're saying.

Aiden stared at the message from Nigel. From Nigel?! When the fuck had he ever been so reasonable?

Actually he had been hadn't he? In the beginning, reasonable and thoughtful. Back before he started to clearly sample too much of the merchandise - an escape he'd needed from the pressure of his job, a terrifying hole he was spiralling into. And even then, Nigel had always treated him respectfully and lovingly. If anything the message served to demonstrate that the picture he had of Nigel in his mind had warped into an exaggerated view of very specific aspects of him.

~Im sorry

Aiden replied before throwing his phone across the room, unsure of which thing he was really apologising for. He curled in on himself once more, crying uncontrollably and wanting Nigel to be there holding him.

*

When Nigel didn't hear anything after the apology message, he assumed it really was done with.

When the message had come through he had sworn under his breath, reading it in Gabi's gorgeous voice in so many tones before settling on it being snarky. She had reached out again and he had shut her down. And whilst he knew he'd been right to do so on this occasion, he

was sure there were many times between them where he hadn't been and it was hard to blame her for cutting ties again then.

He hadn't really been prepared a week later to receive -

~I'm sorry Nigel, it was really inappropriate of me to message you when I was drunk. Or at all really. I'm glad you're doing well, but please forgive the mistake I made in getting in touch. It was unfair of me. I won't do it again.

He felt a sudden search of panic and frantically typed a response.

~Gabi I know things are over between us, but I miss you too. I miss you in my life and if there was ever any way in which we could be friends, just friends, I would take that.

Nigel winced as soon as he sent it. There was no way he could really be *just* friends with Gabi. But he'd rather be hopelessly in unrequited love with her close up rather than from afar. It might not be the healthiest option, in fact he knew it wasn't - but his successive and unsuccessful attempts at dating had proved it was Gabi or no one. So if it had to be no one, he'd at least like her to be in his life.

It was a few minutes before there was a response, Nigel felt like his heart was in his mouth.

~Just friends? Nigel, don't bullshit me!

Nigel grinned, recognising her jovial tone just from the messages.

~I'm telling you I'm a changed man gorgeous. Why not give me a chance? We could just message, that's all. Just stay in touch?

He was grinning but his heart was racing, hopeful - so damn hopeful that she might agree.

It was another half an hour before she finally replied.

~Just messaging. And if either of us needs to cut this off at any point then we do. End of story. I'd like us to be friends, but I don't know if that's possible. So we'll see.

Nigel felt light, for the first time in a long time, he realised. His heart fluttered and he had butterflies in his stomach, just like the first time he'd seen her in the cafe, the first time they'd talked about her art, the first time he'd made love to her, the day she'd vowed till death do us part.

He didn't want to blow this, if friendship was all it could be he was going to fucking make that work. So Nigel did what he always did with his Gabi - moved right back into teasing her like they hadn't been apart for the last five years -

~I agree. First off I have a very important question. Did you see the latest Fast and the Furious movie?? I feel like this is something we need to discuss!

~Not enough guns for you?

He could practically hear her voice, and the smile in it.

~Not enough cars!

*

Aiden dropped onto his bed smiling. It had taken quite a lot to finally say goodnight to Nigel. They had messaged each other for hours and in some ways it felt like no time had passed - so easy and familiar.

It might only be via messages, but this seemed like the best version of Nigel, the Nigel he had loved very deeply. He had to ignore a few times the little twinge of sadness that the messages brought. Friends was better than nothing, but he ached for Nigel, had done from the moment he'd left. Getting along so well just made that ache worse.

Aiden let out a deep sigh and pushed those emotions down, dwelling wouldn't do any good.

He needed a shower and had to be up early for work, but settled back against his pillows anyway. The multitude of things he was feeling was something he was trying incredibly hard to compartmentalise, but in that moment Aiden was aroused.

It was nothing that was explicitly said, just the easy and joyful conversation. The more he could hear Nigel saying those entirely innocent words in his head, the sharper that five year old image of him became. He was suddenly incredibly real to Aiden again, and with that his mind had not held back one bit on supplying refreshed looks at old memories. It was like a digitally remastered blu ray - and over 70% were intimate. Not necessarily sexual, but with as little as Aiden got laid these days, just the memory of watching TV cuddled on the sofa was arousing.

He could give himself a few minutes before he really needed to jump in the shower and get to bed properly. Until then…

Aiden unbuttoned his jeans and pulled them down along with his underwear, settling back as he spread his thighs enough to slide his fingers against his cock. He pinched it between his thumb and fingers jerking it as he imagined Nigel's mouth on him.

He came with Nigel's name on his tongue, fearful of screaming it out loud in case it broke this strange new reality.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

More messages, a phone call and the inevitable misunderstanding...

Chapter Notes

Just to clarify - in this AU, instead of being a musician, Gabi was an artist

~Cheer me up, work was terrible today

Nigel smiled at the demand, so like his Gabi.

~What happened at work? He asked first. They had talked about their jobs in a fair amount of detail over the last couple of months, enough that they had a good understanding of the content, pressure and main players.

~Freddie asked me to step in for a client, they didn't like the artwork we already were doing and she wanted me to create something new for them. But they aren't going to like any art we do, they are so fussy. They described their idea in detail and that's what we already did so I have no idea how to do anything with that. Even after a FOUR HOUR meeting with them this afternoon. I'm exhausted.

~That sounds awful, but if anyone put together something great for them, it's you.

He remembered the art she used to leave around the place, she was extremely talented. She'd even drawn some graphic novels which she had published under a pseudonym. He had copies. He still thumbed them often, feeling so much of her in the pages.

~Ha! We'll see. How was your day?

It went on from there - yet another evening spent chatting about each other's day, devolving into banter or, occasionally, deep and meaningful conversations about various subjects. It was happening almost every night now and Nigel couldn't even try to pretend to be bothered by it. Gabi was the first person he messaged when something of note happened in his life, good or bad, and it felt like the reverse was also true.

It was great - satisfying and fulfilling. Except that it also wasn't.

He went to bed every night feeling her absence keenly, it felt like she should be in the bed next to him but she never was. And he was starting to wonder more and more why she wasn't.

If she had left because of the drugs, he was clean now. And sure that might not fix everything but there was clearly still a spark between and so much shared history that the last five years just felt like a blip. In fact those years felt temporary. In some ways they always had.

He had never been able to imagine his life without Gabi, he could never picture a future without her from the day they had met. Now being back in contact made the last five years feel even more like a limbo - like he had just been waiting for them to get back together. And now that they were at this place, whatever that was, he felt impatient for the universe to resolve itself and bring them fully back together.

Which he knew was unfair and might not be what Gabi wanted, but he couldn't help the pining in his heart for it.

Saying goodnight got harder every time and more than once he had succumbed to his more physical desires for her. And in truth he felt fucking guilty over that. It seemed inappropriate, especially not knowing how she felt about it. Old Nigel would have asked old Gabi. He would have been upfront and told her he wanted to think of her when he jerked off, if she didn't object. Actually old Nigel wouldn't have asked, he'd have told her in a husky voice that he thought of her - her great ass, fucking beautiful tits, her gorgeous mouth and the way she rode his cock - when he had a wank. And she would have laughed and blushed a little, maybe playfully hit his arm and then hummed her consent. But that wasn't who they were to each other anymore, so that wasn't something he was going to ask about.

And if it somehow ever came up? Better to be forgiven after the fact, he guessed.

They had already said goodnight for the evening and Nigel was having a shower as his mind went back to Gabi's laugh. He'd been hearing it in his head all evening as they had messaged each other. And that fucking laugh. It had always filled him with unrivaled pleasure. He loved when Gabi was happy and towards the end of their marriage that had not been often enough.

And how many times had her laughter, her total joy, ended up with them in bed? Him making tender love to her as she lay pliant and gasping beneath him. The thought had him instantly hard and moving his soapy hand to his cock.

He couldn't help but imagine her laughing, pulling him to her and claiming his mouth. He loved it when she was aggressive and he'd be so right back - picking her up as she spread her thighs and thrusting up into her as he held her to the wall. Nigel grunted, legs weakening as his free hand shot out to the tiled wall to hold himself up while the water streamed over him.

"Gabi… unngggg," he grunted her name as he worked himself harder and faster, remembering the way she tensed and gripped around him as they fucked. In his mind he heard her gasp his name… And that was it. Her beautiful fucking voice calling for him had him shooting his load all over the inside of the shower, spilling over and over as his balls drew up and his legs nearly gave out.

When he was finished he moved his other hand to the wall to support himself, leaning there and breathing hard, trying to recover as his heart thundered in his chest and his cock continued to twitch. He wasn't sure of the last time he'd come that hard. He was shaking.

Fuck. He needed Gabi. He wanted them to be friends, he really had started with true intentions in that. But he fucking needed her.

Till death do us part.

He towelled off and went back to his room. His mind still hazy from his climax, he could argue he wasn't quite thinking straight when he sent one final message for the evening.

~I'm not going to push, but I'd love to see you in person, just to talk and maybe get coffee. Let me know if you're ever up for that.

He tried hard to not sound desperate or overbearing.

She didn't reply.

*

Aiden felt like shit.

He hadn't messaged with Nigel for almost a month, not since he'd asked if they could meet up.

He so fucking desperately wanted to say yes. He wanted to spend time with Nigel in person, the man who was once more quickly becoming his best friend. And no small part of him hoped it would be more than that. That they would see each other and the undeniable attraction that had always been between them would resurface and they'd fall into bed together and forget the last five years had ever happened.

Well, that was impossible. Laughable, really.

He looked at himself in the mirror and knew that Nigel wouldn't even know him. He could maybe pass as Gabi's brother, but Nigel wouldn't know *him*. And he was sure that would actually crush him.

How many times had he fantasised over the years of running into Nigel and his husband instantly recognising him and understanding and still wanting him? It was so far from reality that Aiden tried to suppress it at all costs. It wasn't a healthy dream to live in.

Now every night before bed, having spent the evening not talking to Nigel, he would have his shower and look in the mirror - assess himself for any signs of Gabi. It was a really unhealthy focus to have, but he couldn't stop himself doing it, despite the dysphoria it caused.

He hadn't even meant to stop talking to Nigel. He hadn't known what to reply, torn between an emphatic no and lovelorn yes in response to his request to meet up. So he hadn't replied anything and suddenly days became weeks and he was desperately unhappy.

He wondered if Nigel was too. He hadn't tried to contact Aiden since, which he thought showed very much who Nigel was now - respectful. Old Nigel would have bombarded him, he was sure.

Aiden wasn't sure which he preferred.

It was 1am when Aiden woke with a start, his dreams full of losing Nigel. He couldn't do that again.

He reached for his phone.

~I can't meet with you. I'm not ready for that, but I want us to be friends.

He sent it and then lay back, looking at the ceiling as he waited for a reply. He eventually fell back to sleep before getting one.

*

Nigel woke to find a message Gabi had sent in the middle of the night. His heart was pounding as he read it, relieved that he hadn't fucked everything up entirely. He'd backed off when she hadn't replied - wanting to give her space. And then time had marched on and he wondered if he'd ever hear from her again.

He took a deep breath and willed himself not to reply immediately, not to actually fuck things up by pushing too hard.

He put his phone aside and got ready for the day. He had been about to finally reply when his boss called and needed him to start early - a problem with one of the high risk teens at the shelter they often worked with. Nigel was technically the kid's mentor and apparently he needed someone to stop him from walking out of the shelter, the only safe space he had. Nigel was out the door and on his way before he'd even had chance to think about it.

The day was long and draining. He'd managed to talk Randall down, managed to straighten things out with the shelter. He was even about 70% sure that Randall wasn't going to go off and try to score some drugs that night - which was only slightly lower than usual, so it felt like a win.

It wasn't until he sank down onto the sofa with a TV dinner, that Nigel switched off from work and thoughts of Gabi flooded his mind.

Damn, he could really fucking do with someone on days like this. Someone to just snuggle him and help him feel grounded again. He couldn't help but think of how much he'd wanted her with him when he'd got clean, the struggle that continued after that, and then finally getting in good with this programme. Nigel knew she would have been so supportive and loving, as she always had been. But he'd thrown all that away. In fact, if she had stayed maybe he would never had cleaned up his act? The thought made him sick that he hadn't been able to do that for her. He really fucking wished he had.

He typed out a message, feeling drained and needy.

~I'm sorry darling, I shouldn't have asked. I just sometimes wish I could hear your voice.

He winced as soon as he sent it, worried that once more it would sound like he was pushing.

~I just meant, when we message and I think you're laughing with me, I sometimes want to know that you are. Because I'm fucking hilarious and also really need the validation.

He tried to make light of the whole thing and hoped for the best.

An hour later he hadn't had a reply.

He should go to bed. It had been a long day, he was emotionally drained and the one person he wanted to reach out to might not ever reply.

The thought of that, of Gabi really not replying again, made him feel sick. He felt a lump in his throat and a pain in his chest. He couldn't let her go. Not again.

~Please don't shut me out again gorgeous, tell me what I have to do to keep you talking to me.

Another hour went by and Nigel's jaw hurt from clenching his teeth. He could feel a scream of frustration lodged in his throat.

He couldn't leave it like this. He couldn't carry on like this. He needed to talk to Gabi.

*

Aiden didn't realise the phone was ringing until he turned off the shower.

"Oh shit…" He stumbled from the stall and grabbed a towel as he went.

Work had been gruelling and then Freddie had dragged him out for dinner, plied him with a few drinks, before telling him she needed him to go to a last minute meeting the following lunchtime with a new client. They wanted to see a portfolio and talk to an artist, see if they were a good fit before signing up and so she wanted her best on it. So she said. Maybe he was just a light touch?

Even so, by the time he got home he was shattered and awaiting her call with the address details, thankful that she'd at least told him not to worry about coming into the office first. He could likely fit in an hour extra in bed, depending on where the meeting was.

With water dripping down his face, he grabbed his phone from his bed and answered without even checking the caller ID.

"Freddie, can you give me a minute I'm dripping wet and don't have a pen." He huffed. He got along with Freddie Lounds well enough, though she could be a little cut throat. She'd moved from investigative journalism into PR when she'd had one death threat too many. She was an asshole, but she got the job done. He was just glad to be an artist and not one of the account managers.

There was dead air for a moment before Aiden asked, “Freddie?”

Finally someone, clearly not Freddie, cleared their throat and spoke, “Uh… Is Gabi there?”

Aiden felt like all his blood drained from his body, he went cold and started to shake a little.

Nigel.

How did he answer this? How did he explain the clearly masculine voice answering Gabi’s phone. He wasn’t ready for any of the conversations that needed to have happened before this.

“Hello?” Nigel asked again. It was tentative, not aggravated and it made Aiden ache. He could imagine Nigel confused and terrified by what it meant to have some random guy answer his ex-wife’s phone.

“This is Aiden,” The words fell from his mouth in a rush before he’d even decided what to say.

There was silence again before Nigel asked, gruffly this time, “Is Gabi there?”

Aiden pulled the phone away from his ear and hit the end call button without even thinking. He stood staring at the phone, trembling. Watching intently as messages began to load - one from Freddie with the address he needed, three from Nigel over the course of the evening.

Aiden clenched his jaw, trying to hold back a sob.

He was still staring at the phone when a new message popped up, he swiped to read it.

~I guess now I know why you didn’t want to meet up. Darling, you could have told me you are with someone. You have every right to be happy.

Aiden sank to his knees, his towel barely holding up, as he sobbed. He could practically hear the tone Nigel was putting on - strong and nonchalant. He knew what that cost the man, how much he might be hurting, and that hurt his heart in turn.

He wasn’t sure there was any way to fix this without the truth, and he damn well wasn’t sure he was ready for that.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

An attempted reunion

Aiden had worried his bottom lip with his teeth so much that it was starting to get noticeably raw.

“What is with you lately?” Viv asked as she returned to the table with their coffees. The coffee shop was quiet and she hadn’t had to queue long, but even so Aiden’s mind had used even that short time to wander to Nigel’s last text message.

He hadn’t replied and now it had been another week. How was he supposed to explain who Aiden is?

Viv dropped into her seat and frowned, waiting for his response.

He was glad of the fact that this was the first chance they’d had to have a catch up since Viv returned from her honeymoon weeks earlier, because he was never able to hide things from her for long.

“I… I’ve been messaging with Nigel. After the wedding we… we carried on messaging and now...” He gave a slight shake of his head.

“Aiden!” Viv raised her voice a little in admonishment, but there was an edge of pity there too. Aiden hated it.

She had always been on the fence about Nigel. She knew he’d made her friend incredibly happy, but there was always that concern over his business dealings. And really, Viv didn’t ever know quite how illegal some of the club’s operations were. She had hated Nigel’s tattoo. And… well, that he couldn’t disagree with.

But they had gotten along quite well once Viv had realised how happy they were.

“Is that a good idea?” She asked, though it was clear she didn’t believe it to be a question so much as fact.

Aiden shook his head, “I don’t know. Probably not, I just…” He gave a hopeless shrug.

“You just can’t help yourself,” Viv finished for him, gentle concern in her expression.

Aiden let out a shuddering sigh. Things between them had been so intense, but it had worked and he knew Viv was well aware of how hard it had been for Aiden to walk away. How much

he missed Nigel and wished things could have been different. If Nigel had only been able to get himself together when Aiden had needed him. They might have split anyway, but at least then he would have known.

“Maybe I just… I need to know Viv. I’ve tried not to think about it for years. But I need to know how he would have been, if things could have been different,” Aiden damn near implored.

Viv looked pained, she looked near tears and Aiden knew that was for him. She grabbed his hand and squeezed it tight.

“I know baby, I get it. I’m sorry. You… You do what you need to, okay? But you be safe and you let me know if you ever need anything. To talk or… to call the cops.”

Aiden huffed a laugh, “I think you give him too little credit.”

“Maybe, I just care about you and want to be prepared for the very worst case scenario, just in case,” she smiled. “What happens next?”

Aiden shrugged, “I really don’t know. He… he called me, and I answered, like an idiot. I told him I was Aiden, but…” Aiden clenched his jaw and his fists, frustrated by the entire situation. Wanting to tell Nigel the truth, whilst being terrified of losing the connection they had renewed - even if it was just via text. And how the did he even explain this anyway?

It wasn’t like telling family and friends when he came out, or medical professionals when he needed appointments. It wasn’t like telling potential lovers when it became pertinent to do so.

How the hell did he tell Nigel?

*

~Okay, we can meet up. But I choose when and where. There’s a lot we need to talk about.

Gabi’s message arrived just as Nigel got home from work.

It had been a good day - one of their funding applications was approved, one of the kids he mentored had reached three months sober and generally life was looking good. But then he got that amazing fucking message and it might as well be the best day that ever was. Only likely to be eclipsed by them finally meeting again.

The only thing maring it were thoughts of Aiden - whoever the fuck that was.

He clenched his fists then shook his head. He had a jealous streak a mile wide when it came to Gabi, but he wasn’t a fucking idiot. He needed to keep that in check if he wanted to be in her life. If she was remarried then he just needed to deal with that. It was his problem, not hers.

It had taken every bit of restraint he’d gained over the years not to pitch his phone against the nearest wall when some guy had answered instead of Gabi. Instead he had replied with most

of that restraint in place, though reading back after he was sure he came over as a whiny bitch.

He really wouldn't have blamed her for backing off completely, again. And now this.

Nigel set his phone down and ran both hands through his hair before lacing his fingers behind his neck.

This was fucking great. He got to fucking see his gorgeous Gabi in person.

He just needed to not fuck it up. Not get weird about the new husband.

Nigel's heart stopped for a beat and he felt the blood drain from his face. Maybe that was who she had intended to send the "I miss you" message to? Maybe somehow Gabi had mixed up the numbers of her ex-husband and her current husband? And this whole thing had unravelled from that one accident?

When his heart started to beat again it was racing. He knew it was unlikely, she had been drunk but surely it wouldn't have been so easy a mistake to have made? They had never fully discussed it, but she had said it was inappropriate of her to send it, so it must have been intended for him. Right?

It was stupid that this was playing on his mind. He already knew about Aiden now, so it didn't matter. Her having a new person in her life was a fact, regardless of anything else. But it made him wonder.

Was he really ready to meet up with her and not want more? Not clench his jaw and sneer as she explained Aiden to him? Fuck! He'd have to be more than restrained, he'd need a fucking sedative.

The thought made him swallow, hard. He drank lightly now and then, but drugs were a big no, he didn't take prescription drugs unless they were practically forced on him by a doctor. Maybe he should say no? Get his head together more and make sure he wasn't in a place where he might do something stupid?

He grabbed his phone back up again and tapped out a quick reply, not reading it back before sending.

~*Just say when and where darling and I'll be there*

*

Aiden gulped half of the pint down before forcing himself to put it down on the table in front of him.

He had chosen a busy pub near where they used to live. It was over an hour to drive from where he lived now, so he shouldn't drink too much anyway. He'd be fine to drive back after the one pint if he gave it a couple of hours.

At least that was what Aiden's sensible brain was telling him. The not so sensible bit was filling his mind with memories of having sex with Nigel. Wondering whether he still lived close by so that if they had a few drinks Aiden could stay over. Perhaps they'd end up in bed.

Remembering the way Nigel used to tenderly worship his body, sent chills racing over his body. He had to keep reminding himself that was probably the least likely thing that would happen this evening.

He'd wanted somewhere busy so that it didn't feel intimate. He didn't want that pressure for either of them. But also so that it was safe.

Aiden wanted to think the best of Nigel, but really he had very little frame of reference in this respect, other than one of the dancers at Nigel and Darko's club being a lesbian, to base any reaction Nigel might have. They had been very good to the dancer. But this wasn't that situation. Nigel might walk out. He might shout and scream. He might… He wouldn't hit him surely? Aiden knew Nigel was capable of violence, but he also knew that he'd have never raised a hand to him back then. Now? Would Nigel hit Aiden?

He couldn't say. He hated that he couldn't say for sure.

Aiden gulped a few more mouthfuls of his pint and kept an eye on the door. He'd deliberately arrived early, having arranged for Nigel to meet him at the bar, he'd actually taken one of the smaller tables near the door. His intention was to have an easy out via that door should things go bad. He would wait for Nigel, then join him at the bar, leaving that line of escape open if he needed to. That was the plan.

And then Nigel walked in.

*

Nigel had spent hours getting ready. He had no idea how it was possible for him to take so fucking long. He could only put it down to the two hour long agonising over the perfect shirt to wear. He went back and forth on the decision so many times that he was pressed for time when he finally decided to settle on the dachshund shirt.

He had plenty of new shirts. Nicer shirts too, but Gabi had always loved this shirt. It had always made her smile.

And if there was one thing Nigel was really in desperate want of, it was Gabi's fucking smile.

He had been disappointed her with choice of location, having hoped it would be somewhere quiet, more intimate. Perhaps one of the restaurants they used to go to. Nigel remembered fondly those days of feeding each other tasters of each other's meals, Gabi's leg running up and down his calf under the table. God, he'd fucking loved that.

This pub would have to do though, as long as he got to see Gabi, that was all that mattered.

Nigel took a deep breath before opening the door and walking in. He was immediately assaulted by the noise of the place - a constant din, people fighting to speak over the music.

Glasses clinking, being thudded drunkenly onto tables and bars. This was a hell of a place, always so fucking busy on a Friday night.

It occurred to him then, though his brain had tried to take him near this thought several times since they had decided to meet up - that she wanted to meet him somewhere busy. She wanted safety in numbers. Which was disappointing, in fact it stang him that she thought so little of him. He wasn't the man he used to be, which sure she had no reason to believe that. But even so he'd never even raised his voice to her.

What could she possibly think she could say that would make him react poorly? He was already as mentally prepared as he was going to get, to hear all about her new husband and how amazing he was.

Nigel got to the bar, these thoughts playing on his mind as he glanced around to see if she had already arrived. He didn't see her, so he took an empty bar stool and ordered his drink - a soda. Best stay on every wagon possible tonight.

Nigel was half way through his drink when he checked his watch again. She was late. Only twenty minutes, but with each second he grew more agitated. Perhaps she was stuck in traffic? Maybe he should message her?

Perhaps… perhaps Aiden had been unhappy with her meeting with her ex and put a stop to it?

The thought of the husband made his jaw clench and brought a strange lump to his throat. She had been so quick on their divorce hadn't she? It wasn't even a year after she'd left and they'd had no contact other than a few messages in the beginning to sort out getting her stuff. She had moved into his place when they got married. He'd have given her fucking half of it if she'd wanted. But no, she wanted a quick a simple divorce, managed by a solicitor. He hadn't even been able to see her.

Had she already met this guy so soon after she split? Had she wanted to remarry so quickly? What if she'd met him before she left?

"Fuck," Nigel muttered under his breath. Not angry, but frustrated at himself. What if she had? What did it matter? What if that's what she told him tonight? He could either ignore it and continue to try and make this weird fucking friendship work, or he could be an asshole about it and he'd probably never see her again. It was in the past, there was nothing he could do about it so…

Nigel caught himself and smiled, letting out a chuckle to himself. Yeah, the very fact that he was considering all of this so incredibly rationally made evident how much he'd changed.

This was going to be fine.

*

That fucking shirt.

Aiden had always loved that shirt. He'd teased Nigel mercilessly about how soft and cute he was in it. Of course, Nigel had never once minded being soft and cute for him. Back then at least.

Aiden was suddenly flooded by the weight of expectation that Nigel had. Nigel's expectation to see Gabi. He watched as Nigel waited whilst he was frozen to his seat.

Nigel checked his watch, looked around. He drank and looked fraught, then smiled. He looked happy. He looked excited.

Aiden felt a knot of anxiety in his chest, burning it's way down to his stomach.

He wanted his legs to work. He wanted to get up and walk over and for Nigel to see him and wrap him up in his arms and tell him how much he'd missed him and didn't want to ever let him go again. But he couldn't, because that was the welcome waiting for Gabi. Not for him.

"Fucking stupid…" Aiden growled the words at himself. He'd been such an idiot to think this was at all a possibility. How the fuck could he walk up to his ex-husband and explain the last five years? And the months and years before that when Nigel hadn't even realised there was anything wrong.

Aiden's eyes were stinging as he tried to hold back tears. Being so close to Nigel after all these years, just a few short steps away from him, and it felt like his soul was being ripped in two.

He fumbled for his phone, knowing he should leave to do this, but just too curious. Too desperately in need of being in the same room as Nigel for as long as he could be.

Aiden typed out a quick message -

~I'm so sorry Nigel. I thought I could do this, but I'm not ready.

He saw the moment Nigel read the message.

First he looked around the bar, as if to see whether Gabi was sending it from inside the room. Then he frowned and clearly let out a heavy sigh. He seemed deflated but not mad. He looked pretty crushed and that made Aiden's heart ache. It took everything in him not to walk over and wrap his arms around the man.

He saw Nigel tapping on his phone, glad that he had it on silent when the reply came in -

~That's okay gorgeous. I'm ready whenever you're ready.

Nigel's jaw was tight when he picked up his drink and downed the remnants. He looked like he was about to get up and leave, which made Aiden's heart thunder in his chest - he'd have to walk right passed him. But instead Nigel picked up his phone again -

~It's okay if you're never ready, just don't ever stop messaging me, okay?

Aiden stifled a cry. An actual fucking cry of distress and pain and heart sickness. Clearly not stifled well enough as a few people at the next table looked over at him curiously.

He could see Nigel turning on the barstool, turning in his direction to see what had caused the strange and near primal sound.

Without hesitation, Aiden stood and bolted for the door, not looking back.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Finally, the reunion.

Well, it could have gone worse?

Aiden felt it was unfair of him, but he went back to messaging Nigel as though nothing had happened. As though they hadn't tried to meet up, as though it hadn't been a complete disaster.

Instead he had left it a couple of days and then just text one of his usual, 'what a day' sort of things, starting the ball rolling on another seemingly mundane contact.

After days of this business as usual resumed, Aiden was starting to feel emotionally strung out - pulled taut and likely to snap like a rubber band at any moment.

"Hey Viv," He hadn't even known who he was going to call when he picked up the phone, the temptation to call Nigel being so great,

"Hey babe, you sound weird, what's wrong?" She asked immediately.

He let out an abrupt laugh, "Oh, lots. Work is kicking my ass right now and…" Of course the reason work was such a bitch was because he was having so many issues concentrating and generally being inspired. As much as he tried not to, his thoughts went back time and again to his abortive meeting with Nigel. Wondering what would have happened had he stayed, feeling like shit for running out he did. The whole thing left a sour feeling in his gut.

"Aiden?" She urged at his hesitation.

"I tried to meet up with Nigel," He replied quickly.

"Fuck. Tried? What happened? Are you okay?" Her concern broke his heart and he was sure he could hear her moving and imagined she was likely grabbing her keys to come over.

"I'm fine Viv, no need to jump in the car. Well, as fine as I can be? This whole thing sucks. I lost my nerve and stood him up," Aiden tried not to wail.

"Damn, how was he about that?" She asked cautiously. "Have you talked to him?"

"He was… sat across the room from me and I saw his pain, felt his pain, when I messaged that I wasn't coming," He trailed off, the guilt and anger at himself flaring anew.

“You… You just… Shit, Aiden, that’s some sort of masochistic,” There was no reprimand in her tone, but something like pity, which he hated even if he could understand it. “What can I do?” She offered.

He shook his head, “Nothing, we’ve moved on from it, gone back to normal, whatever that is, and ignored that it happened at all.”

Viv let out an exasperated sound. “But…?”

He huffed a light chuckle, she knew him well enough.

“But, I still… I still want to see him. I need to see him. What’s the point in even being in contact if I don’t tell him, explain what happened. That hadn’t been my intention originally, but… well I guess it had been but I didn’t want to admit it to myself. And even if it hadn’t been, where else can we go from here? Just stay in this weird limbo forever? It’s not healthy.”

Viv laughed at that, “It really isn’t. Look, I say go for it. Somewhere safe and… well, safe. You know, but do it, rip off that band aid. Because I know you baby, this will just eat you alive until you do.”

He couldn’t disagree.

*

Despite everything, Gabi’s messages remained the highlight of his day and Nigel knew he had to be satisfied with that.

After the aborted attempt at meeting, he knew he had to be satisfied with whatever she could give. He had been hurt and disappointed, but he couldn’t pretend he didn’t understand or appreciate her hesitation. And she might never get over that. It had been wrong of him to ask, wrong of him to push. He wasn’t about to make that mistake again. He had to just make peace with himself over what he would accept. And the choices left were Gabi via messages or no Gabi at all.

It was so damn unhealthy. He wasn’t fucking fooling himself on that front. Several times he’d considered talking to Alana, his boss, asking her advice as someone trained in therapy. Not that it took someone with any kind of counseling experience to tell him this was fucked up no matter how it was sliced. He could have asked a stranger in the street and they’d tell him something he really already knew.

Nigel knew, eventually, he’d have to have the conversation with himself about whether or not he could continue to do this, even if just for her sake. He didn’t know if this was fucking with Gabi’s head half as much as it was fucking with his, but either way it was fuckery he didn’t wish upon her. And if she wouldn’t break from this then he would have to for both their sakes.

He hated being the fucking reasonable one in all this. It would be hilarious if it wasn’t so damn awful.

They needed to be free of each other in the long run. It was something he'd been contemplating all day. It had been a quiet workday for a change, a positive day full of small successes for the people he was charged with and that was a fucking banner day in all. Maybe it was because of that that his mind kept slipping to Gabi. Specifically to his addiction to her.

Because now, all these years on and with the benefit of time, distance and growth, he understood that she had been another of his addictions. That didn't mean he didn't love her, or that their relationship was completely unhealthy, but perhaps aspects of it were. Perhaps the way he had treated her sometimes had been. When he'd put his need and desire to have her in his life, before her actual wellbeing, as much as he was loathe to fucking admit it.

And as with any self aware recovering addict, he needed to recognise what this was and that it was once more becoming unhealthy for him, for them both.

If they'd met, if she'd turned up, perhaps it would have been different. Maybe they would have hit it off like old times and developed a real friendship from it, not just this weird situation they were in. Or perhaps they'd hate each other and it would all end there, go their separate ways finally, with the closure they needed.

But that hadn't happened, they remained in a delusional limbo that Nigel knew he really didn't need to talk to Alana to have confirmed.

The high from a day's work well done faded as he got in through his door and continued as he put his dinner in the oven, planning to have a shower as it cooked. He was stripped to his underwear when the message came through -

~Hey. I'm sorry about before, can we try to meet again? I think I need to. I think I'm ready now.

"Fuck," Nigel muttered under his breath, shaking his head and feeling like he was going to vomit out his heart, "Gabi, don't do this to me…" he said to the empty room, whilst tapping out the reply -

~Sure darling, tell me when and where.

*

This was it. Aiden wasn't going to back out this time.

Because he couldn't allow it. There was nothing that could happen at this meeting that would be worse than staying in this painful and unresolved position, that he was sure was torturing them both. It had been months now since Viv's wedding, months of getting to know each other again.

And truth was, he was falling in love with Nigel all over again. The parts that were still as he used to be, and all the new things that had him damn near swooning as Nigel demonstrated a new thoughtful and compassionate side. He had never sought to change Nigel back when they were married - in sickness and in health - but the drugs hadn't been the only problem. His obsessive passion for Gani had been flattering at first and at times almost exhausting. His

jealousy had sometimes been consuming. And yet, Aiden couldn't see that of him now. It seemed like part of his character that had diminished along with the drugs, or at least had been brought into check.

This was make or break.

He had no real expectation of a renewed relationship beyond the friendship they had rekindled, and knew he risked losing that. As much as he hoped Nigel would take one look at him, recognise him and pull him into a passionate embrace, it was pure fantasy. One that he had foolishly indulged, but that needed to end. One way or another. Likely another. Likely Nigel would never want to have any contact with him ever again. Possibly his reaction could be less controlled than he appeared to have become.

Aiden had prepared himself as best he could for that eventuality.

And maybe foolishly, had chosen a different location for their meeting than he had before.

Before, he had based it on somewhere that would be familiar to them both, perhaps comforting in some small way. A call back to other times to soften the blow of what Aiden needed to say. But Aiden wondered if that had been part of the issue? That wasn't his place, it wasn't Aiden's. It was Gabi's and the weight of expectation on her to be present there was insurmountable.

This time Aiden chose a place in the city - a gay bar. He'd been there a few times socially, but was there regularly in their little upstairs room-for-hire for meetings with the local transgender group. They knew him there well enough, knew he was trans. He felt comfortable there and supported, protected.

If the absolute worst happened…

Aiden tried not to let that train of thought consume him as he sat at the bar, a death grip on his pint.

"You okay?" The owner of the bar was an older guy, a total bear. Pretty much looked liked Santa might if he were a hipster - thickset and with a greying beard against his dark skin - he wore pressed shirts with suspenders. Aiden wasn't actually sure of his real name, everyone called him Santa.

Aiden nodded, "I'm fine… I'm meeting someone," He managed a smile, "I'm just nervous."

Santa huffed a deep chuckle and winked cheekily at him, "Sweet thing you have absolutely no reason to be nervous. He's a lucky guy."

Santa moved off to serve someone further down the bar, leaving Aiden with a bittersweet feeling in the pit of his stomach. It was good to have that affirmation, but he was terrified that it was totally incorrect.

He drew in a breath and let it out shakily, turning to watch the door.

*

Nigel had never heard of this place Gabi wanted to meet at, but called The Bear Bar made him wonder if it was near the fucking zoo or something.

It became immediately obvious as he approached it that it was a gay bar.

He wasn't sure how to feel about that. Nigel wasn't exactly uncomfortable around gay people, some of the kids he worked with were gay. He didn't pretend to get it, but he did understand that it was what had made those kids more vulnerable, that it had contributed to their situations and subsequent addictions. He'd never been to a gay bar before, but that wasn't the oddity so much as why Gabi had chosen such a place.

Maybe she knew people who worked at the bar? Maybe she was a lesbian now, maybe that's why she left? No, there was that Aiden guy. Maybe he was gay? No, that didn't make any sense. They were together. Weren't they?

The thought that they might not be gave him a weird tingling sensation in his gut that he knew was hope.

Nigel didn't realise he'd been stood outside, frozen in thought, until a couple of guys walked passed him and into the bar, shooting him a curious look.

Nigel walked off, to the end of the street and pulled out his phone.

~This is a gay bar darling, is that right? That's where we're meeting?

Maybe he'd got it wrong?

A reply flashed back almost instantly.

~Yeah, that's the place. I'm at the bar - to the right as you come in

Nigel swallowed, his palms getting sweaty.

Fuck. She was really there this time. His heart was slamming in his chest and he thought for a second he might fucking pass out. Part of him wanted to turn and run, it was so fucking much. But he knew the moment he saw her everything would feel better.

Nigel took a deep breath and grit his teeth, marching back to the door and pulling it open before he gave himself chance to hesitate.

He was sure he'd stopped breathing as he stepped inside. He looked to the right but it took his eyes a moment to adjust to the lower light of the bar. There were a few people being served and then there, all the way along to the end, there was a figure. His heart fucking jumped.

Gabi. Gabi. Gabi.

His mind kept screaming her name now he was so close he could practically taste her kisses.

He closed his eyes and tried to cool himself. She was with someone, this was nothing more than friendship at best. Maybe not even that. Maybe this was the point where he found the strength to tell her that this was too unhealthy for them both to continue.

If he could just see her, hear her voice, feel her in his arms once more, then he'd have the strength to walk away from her, to save her.

He wanted so desperately to believe that as he stepped one foot in front of the other. Shaky legs taking him ever closer to her. The love of his fucking life.

*

Aiden was terrified.

Nigel was walking towards him.

Towards *him*. Towards Aiden.

Fuck.

There really was no backing out of this now as Nigel strode the length of the room, his face going from that stressed look he sometimes got, to confusion as he grew closer.

When Nigel started to glance about him, slowing a little, as though Gabi must be there somewhere, Aiden knew he had to say something. He owed the man that after all this fuckery since Viv's wedding, if nothing else.

"Nigel," He called out, suddenly aware of how masculine his voice was. The reminder of who he had been, the skin he had lived in and voice he had spoken with was disjointing and he was hit with a brief but sudden and startling wave of dyspohria. He shuddered.

He'd forgotten what it was like to live like that all the time.

Nigel stopped. Standing a few feet away in the not quite busy enough bar. It felt like they were suspended in a bubble with people floating around the periphery.

"I… I'm looking for Gabi," Nigel's eyes narrowed in on him suspiciously.

Aiden could only nod dumbly, which just made Nigel frown all the more before he finally replied, "I'm Aiden."

He saw the flash of anger on Nigel's face, that anger that bubbled under the surface, that potential for violence that he had always known was there but had seen beyond to the sweet heart of the man.

"Where's Gabi?" Nigel growled the words, and Aiden felt himself crumbling a little. He wanted to run away and run to Nigel all at once.

"Will you sit? I can explain everything," Aiden offered, pointing at the bar stool next to him and then swallowing hard, realising he was shaking.

Nigel looked like he was going to say something else, perhaps refuse, but then Santa was next to them at the bar.

“Can I get you something, my friend?” He asked Nigel, who immediately shook his head and then took the stool, staring at Aiden the whole time.

Aiden caught the look Santa threw him, silent support should he needed. Aiden forced a smile at the barman and replied, “I’m still good thanks. Maybe in a little while.”

Santa nodded and carried on down the bar, starting to clear away empties though Aiden could feel the man still watching them intently. He could almost laugh, Nigel gave off that dangerous vibe. Maybe it was the horrendous neck tattoo or the way he looked like he was ready to take down a guy with his bare hands if he had good cause.

“I’m going to lose my patience soon, kid. Where’s Gabi?” Nigel’s words were low and menacing.

“I…,” Aiden couldn’t fucking help his desire to lean into the man, even with the threat hanging between them, he so desperately wanted to curl against his husband’s chest as he had done a million times before when he’d been worried or stressed. It took everything in him not to do it, not to close the distance between them. Instead he leaned back a little, putting that tiny bit more space to them, as though that lessened the draw.

“And just who the fuck are you Aiden?”

“I’m a friend of-” Aiden cut himself off. Where had that lie come from? He was being defensive and that was going to get him nowhere. He couldn’t keep pretending and fob Nigel off more and more. He had to own this if he was ever going to move on and get the closure he needed. “I’m… I was Gabi.”

Aiden watched Nigel intently for a reaction but the man was blank, confused at most.

For himself, Aiden felt suddenly free and light. The feeling he’d had after coming out, and letting people know that truth about him. Letting them see the real him. Come what may now, however Nigel reacted, the worst was over. The revelation, the confession.

“What the fuck are you talking about? Is this a joke?” Nigel looked around him again, as though expecting Gabi to arrive and explain this guy was some nutter who got his kicks fucking with people.

“Nigel,” Aiden said his name firmly, drawing his attention back sharply. He felt confident now, able to do this. “It’s me. This is why I left.”

Nigel’s brow knit together in a deep, aggressive frown as he stared at Aiden, still searching for the truth.

And then he found it.

Aiden saw the moment he found it. The moment he looked hard enough to see how much this man looked like his ex-wife. Underneath the sharper edges and firmer muscles: the same

nose, the same eyes.

Nigel took a sharp breath and tried to step off his stool whilst moving backwards. *Reeling* backwards. His eyes didn't leave Aiden - taking in his face, his body, his hands, the way he sat on the stool, the way he held his drink.

"That's not… Gabi was… Gabi is…" Nigel looked angry but Aiden knew better, knew the hurt and fear he was hiding.

"Nigel," Aiden said softly, reaching forward in an automatic response to soothe him, but Nigel reeled further, almost tripping over his feet and now standing with the abandoned barstool between them.

"Don't fucking touch me," Nigel snapped, loud enough to turn some heads. The sharp words and concerned looks rocked Aiden back to reality and he withdrew his hand.

"Please will you sit so we can talk?" Aiden tried to keep his own tone level but it threatened to break with anger, frustration and sorrow.

Nigel was already shaking his head before Aiden finished speaking, "This is a fucking joke, a sick fucking joke."

"It's not a joke, please just…" Aiden was aware of all eyes in the bar now on them, not least Santa's as he slowly moved back down the bar towards them. "I couldn't tell you then Nigel, I can tell you now. I want to tell you, all of it." Aiden's tone was pleading, wanting Nigel to settle before Santa got to them and things potentially escalated.

"Don't," Nigel snapped. "Don't, I can't hear this. I don't want to…" His voice went from angry to anguished within a few words.

"You never could hear me Nigel, not when you didn't want to. When I had something important to say but you were too busy getting high." Aiden regretted the bitter words as soon as he said them, true as they might be.

The flash of pain across Nigel's face hurt Aiden just as deeply as it hurt Nigel. But it seemed to defuse the man, this new Nigel he had claimed to be. The recovering addict who listened.

He looked at Aiden, still suspicious, still upset.

"You're… You're Gabi? My Gabi?" Nigel asked, his voice breaking on the words.

Aiden felt his eyes sting as tears welled up and his bottom lip quivered. "Yes Nigel, your Gabi." He replied, near sobbing.

Nigel shook his head, not in disbelief but something else. Something too big for him to process apparently, because then he turned on his heel and walked out, the entire bar watching him go.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Nigel tries to deal with Aiden's revelation and starts to wonder how much it matters...

Chapter Notes

CONTENT WARNING!! I haven't tagged this because I wouldn't say there are any out right transphobia from Nigel, but be warned this chapter contains some thoughts Nigel has about Gabi that might be hurtful as he's trying to get his head around it all. They are coming from a place of hurt and not meant as transphobia, just his brain jumping around different thoughts before dismissing all the shitty ones basically.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nigel roamed the streets most of the night.

He wasn't going to lie to himself, he considered more than once getting drunk or getting high. It felt like he was in some parallel fucking universe or a prank video and someone would jump out and shout 'gotcha'.

Every time he even tried to process the idea that Gabi was not Gabi any more, was - apparently - a man named Aiden, he felt grief. It was like she'd died and he'd just been talking to a ghost of her this whole time.

She might as well be dead.

The thought kept repeating in his head, his stomach turning more and more sour until he was sure he was going to vomit. It wasn't just the idea of Gabi being dead that turned his stomach, but that he was having the thought at all.

As much as his anger drove the idea, the frustration of having not known and of having lost her either way, there was resistance to it. Part of his brain was angry at himself for even thinking this was akin to her dying. He'd been talking to her hadn't he? She wasn't a fucking ghost. She was Aiden.

A fresh wave of anger rose at the deception. He felt tricked. He'd never stopped loving her and he was sure from their messages that she loved him. If not still, then at least there was the possibility she might fall in love with him again if there were no obstacle to it - now he was

clean. His mind was reeling from Aiden no longer being the obstacle of a potential husband, to Aiden being Gabi.

Gabi was Aiden.

Nigel balled his fists as he stalked down the street. Going up and down the blocks near his home, like a prowling animal not yet ready to be caged within the confines of his apartment walls.

He got to the end of the street and turned down the side alley to take him back in a loop. He turned and walked with the building wall to his side before stopping abruptly and slamming his fist into the brickwork.

Pain exploded through his hand, though still not enough to distract from the inner pain and turmoil. He grunted and continued on, not looking down at the wetness he could feel across his knuckles.

Gabi was Aiden.

She'd fucking lied to him all this time. And not just since they started texting. How long had she known? Had this always been the case and she just kept it from him the whole time they were together? What the fuck was in her head on their wedding day?

How fucking dare she?!

Nigel realised he was practically snarling as he neared the end of the alleyway and turned onto the street. There was a car parked at the end of the alley that he had to squeeze passed to get onto the street. Some asshole always parked there and he was so tempted to slam his fist through the window.

And then he caught his reflection in the car window.

Disheveled, face screwed up in anger - a snarl on his lips.

His knuckles wet with blood. His own blood. It hadn't always been, sometimes it was the blood of someone who owed him money, or crossed him in some other way.

His expression softened as he considered himself. The person he had been.

He would never have hurt Gabi, never physically harmed her or touched a fucking hair on her head.

But in her place would he have trusted that? If he'd been high, he wasn't sure how he'd have reacted if she told him any of this shit. He wanted to believe he wouldn't have touched her, but maybe he would have smashed up their apartment. Maybe there was a reason she didn't want to explain this to a violent drug addict, even if he did believe he'd never hurt her.

Because he'd fucking hurt her plenty anyway hadn't he? He'd chosen the drugs over her more times than he wanted to admit. He'd hurt her so much, but those scars weren't visible.

Nigel let out the cry that was lodged in his throat and fell back against the wall, letting his head drop into his hands. The pain in his knuckles throbbed in the same rhythm as his thundering heart.

He couldn't blame her for this, if nothing else he had to acknowledge that. Once he pulled himself together he'd let himself see reason - that this was just how things were.

Gabi is Aiden.

He sank to the cold, damp concrete and numbly studied the shitty car in front of him.

*

~Jack told me what happened at the bar, are you okay?

Aiden's eyes hurt from crying and lack of sleep, it took him a moment to focus in on the text and realise that it was sent by Bella, Santa's partner. She ran the trans group and they got on well enough that they'd exchanged numbers and had coffee a couple of times. She and Santa - Jack? - had been together since before she transitioned and he'd stuck with her. Worshiped the ground she fucking walked on actually - that much was clear whenever they were in a room together.

He knew he should reply but he didn't have it in him in that moment, dragging himself to the shower instead. He stayed under the water, tears flowing once more, until the water ran cold and he had to turn it off. Aiden grabbed the fluffy towel from the rack and wrapped it around himself, still frozen. He should get back under the covers.

Thank fuck it was Sunday, he didn't need to think about work. Didn't need to make the effort to call in, though he wasn't convinced he wouldn't have to do that in the morning.

He really should message Bella back so she didn't worry. And thank Santa for taking care of him. He'd been a fucking mess after Nigel walked out. But suddenly Santa had been right there, stood directly in front of him, the customer side of the bar, blocking him from the curious eyes of the other patrons and speaking in a low soothing voice. He had made sure Aiden was okay and called him a taxi. Fuck, he didn't deserve that kindness. Nigel had every right to the anger he must feel right now.

Hadn't he been misleading him for months? Or was it years? Maybe. Aiden just wasn't sure any more, the whole thing was a fucking mess.

But at least it was over now. He could get closure. He knew Nigel's reaction now. He walked, and he would have walked out back then had Aiden not walked out first. That was definitely clear now.

Aiden dropped onto his bed and took a steadying breath, all cried out and heart sore, but there was light at the end of the tunnel now. One that wasn't an oncoming train. It hurt, it fucking hurt so much, but it was an answer and that's what he'd needed.

He pulled the towel with him as he burrowed himself back under the covers and grabbed his phone, tapping a quick message to Bella.

~Thanks for the message. I'll be okay. It's a long story, I'll explain when I see you next, but please thank Santa for me x

When the phone beeped back a minute later, Aiden expected a response from Bella.

He hadn't expected a message from Nigel.

~I can't pretend I'm not going through some shit with this, but I should have let you explain. I shouldn't have walked out. I'm sorry.

Aiden felt his heart shatter.

*

Nigel sat wringing his hands. He knew better than to have expected an immediate reply. He wondered if he'd get one at all. He'd understand if Gabi - Aiden - just drew a line under the whole thing and moved on at this point.

But then his phone pinged.

And he'd done something really fucking stupid weeks earlier - he'd personalised the notification sound for Gabi's number. So now he knew that this specific message that had arrived, as he was packing up to leave work Monday morning, was Gabi.

Aiden.

Fuck, he had to get used to that. He had already been a big enough shit over this, which may or may not be justified, but he should make the effort to get the fucking name right. It was weird and jarring. It was almost harder to refer to her as Aiden and as male than it was to think it.

Him. Fuck.

Nigel clenched his jaw and continued to put away his things and grab his jacket before heading out of the office and pulling his phone out of his pocket.

~I understand. It was wrong of me to spring it on you like that, I just wasn't sure how else to communicate it. I wanted to do it face to face. Do you want to talk?

The thought brought a shiver of nerves over Nigel. Too much of a risk to say something without thinking, whether he really meant it or not. Better not to allow that situation. He hesitated before replying -

~Messaging is okay.

This time the reply was almost instant.

~What do you want Nigel? Do you want to discuss this or ignore it? Go back to sending texts and being friends

~Ignore that I know? You mean, make believe I'm still just chatting with Gabi?

~No. Sorry that would be weird, I can't do that. I meant, just start over I guess. Ignore the bar and chat with me, with Aiden.

Weirdly, Nigel could hear the words in his voice as Aiden, not Gabi. Her voice had been lost now that the vague memory of it had been completely dissipated by Aiden's so similar but deeper tone. He found himself trying to remember what Aiden looked like, wanting to study his image and find the similarities and differences.

He must have taken too long to reply because his phone beeped again as he walked down the street, making his way home.

~I'd be sorry to lose the friendship we've been rekindling, but I understand if you want to lose my number. That would be okay.

Nigel sighed and tapped his reply quickly before it seemed like he did want to cut off contact.

~It was never just a friendship though, was it darling?

He pressed send and then his blood chilled at the phrasing he'd have happily sent Gabi, but Aiden?

~I guess you're right. I hoped we could be friends, but I can't deny that it might be impossible.

Nigel was surprised that his heart sank at that, and only hesitated a moment before replying honestly - because there was no other choice at this point -

~I'm not ready to say goodbye to you, Aiden

*

~I'm not ready to say goodbye to you, Aiden

Aiden wasn't able to help the sob that bubbled up from his chest. He dropped his phone onto the sofa and put his head in his hands. He thought he'd felt turmoil before, but that apparently had been nothing to the current reeling.

He grabbed his phone and tapped quickly, tears stinging his eyes and determination gripping him.

~I can't stay in limbo Nigel, I wanted to meet you again so I could get closure. I can't keep dragging this out. I'm sorry. It's either friendship or goodbye.

Aiden was going to throw his phone back down but kept it clutched in his hand instead, willing a reply. An end somehow. This had been such a huge mistake. He felt a festering

sourness, a deep anger at himself for having sent that very first message at Viv's wedding.

Aiden jumped when the phone rang.

He looked down to his shaky hands and still expected it would be Freddie or Viv, but Nigel's number flashed on the screen.

Aiden felt sick with nerves and anxiety, made worse by the thrill that crept up his spine. He forced himself to pick up the call, speaking before Nigel had chance -

"I thought you wanted to text only?" There was no accusation there, if anything Aiden knew he sounded quiet and exhausted.

There was a pause on the other end, and he wondered if Nigel was trying to hear Gabi in his voice.

"Where do you live darling? Let me come over and talk in person."

There was something unspoken there, like it was the least Nigel owed him and perhaps it would finally be over then. They would scream and shout at each other until Nigel left or a neighbour called the cops. Or they would have a heart to heart and leave each other in a better place even if it was the last thing they ever said to each other.

"Okay," Aiden drew in a shaky breath and relayed his address.

Chapter End Notes

Planning on posting the next chapter on Feb 14th <3

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

It's time to have all those conversations...

Chapter Notes

PLEASE NOTE: The opening of this chapter has references to transphobic language and fear over transphobic assault.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aiden felt sick with nerves.

He had always been so careful. When he'd hooked up with guys, he'd rarely given them his address. He'd met with them somewhere public, sometimes having a quick fumble or tumble in a bathroom or the back of a car. Certainly having a couple of dates with them before he even considered being really alone with them. He'd had more than one friend lured onto a date by someone on a dating app, only to be beaten the moment they were somewhere private. Kicked and thumped and called a sicko, a freak, a tranny.

And this was Nigel, who would never have harmed a hair on Gabi's head.

He trusted him. He did.

And yet part of him was terrified. The idea of Nigel being one of those assholes broke his heart.

But he wouldn't be. He couldn't be.

The buzzer for the outer door sounded and Aiden moved to his front door, pushing the button at his end that released the lock. And then he could hear feet on the stairs, pounding up in time with his heartbeat. Then a gentle rap on the door.

"It's Nigel," The quiet voice rumbled. So soft, so gentle. Just like his Nigel had always been with him, with Gabi.

Aiden wanted to open the door and fall into his arms, but that wasn't going to happen. It wasn't fair for him to let it. He reminded himself that this had to be it, closure finally. Either they moved on from this as friends, or they just moved on.

He took a deep breath to centre himself, head resting against the door. Too long really, he knew Nigel would knock again or maybe turn and leave, so he turned the lock quickly and pulled the door open, moving behind it as if using it as a barrier.

And perhaps he was. Perhaps it wasn't a physical one he needed though. What he needed was an emotional one, a mental one. One that stopped his heart flipping as Nigel walked into his apartment, all the way in, before turning and offering a cautious smile.

"Thanks for letting me come over."

Aiden swallowed and nodded, then turned and closed the door before resting his back against it.

"You want tea? Coffee?" Aiden mumbled, grasping for something to say.

Nigel's smile grew a little but he shook his head, "Do you have anything stronger? Beer?"

Aiden huffed a quiet laugh.

"Sure," He hesitated for a moment before pushing away from the door and heading into the little kitchen, his back to Nigel.

He felt his skin prickle with fear and anticipation. His mind supplied an image of Nigel coming after him, striking him. Then a different one of him moving behind Aiden as he got to the fridge, sliding his hands around his waist and nuzzling into his neck like he'd done a million times before.

Neither happened.

Aiden returned from the kitchen with a bottle of beer in each hand to find Nigel poking around his little desk by the window with the good light.

"These are amazing, you…" Nigel hesitated as he looked up, as though the image of Aiden was jarring. "Your art always was amazing, but this is even better."

It wasn't lost on Aiden how difficult it likely was for Nigel to acknowledge that he was the person he had known before. To say it out loud. Aiden had even struggled with it in the beginning. So many did. So easy to misgender or dead name yourself in those early days, because change is never easy or simple even if it is wanted and necessary.

"Thanks, I uh…" Aiden stood awkwardly, unsure of what to say or do next. Everything that came to mind seemed too deep, too personal.

"Shall we sit?" Nigel pointed at the large sofa and Aiden nodded, placing both bottles on the coffee table before sitting at one end. He tucked his legs up under him and sat as far into the corner as he could, surprised when Nigel sat almost in the centre of the sofa - so close - rather than ensconcing himself at very the opposite end.

Aiden picked up his bottle and started to pick at the label, looking down, though he could hear Nigel retrieve his own bottle and take a few swigs. It was easy to visualise, to remember,

his throat bobbing as he swallowed. Stubble that Aiden had spent what must total hours, if not days, of his nuzzling into.

“You’re nervous,” Nigel commented.

Because of course he could read him completely, always had been able to.

“Yeah, sorry,” Aiden mumbled and looked up to find Nigel looking at him. No, studying him. His expression was gentle, friendly, but his eyes were searching. “You’re… looking for her.” Aiden said.

Nigel’s jaw tightened and he frowned before looking away, looking down at his own beer and then swigging it back. Half the bottle was gone and he set it on the table in front of him.

“I don’t really drink any more,” Nigel said to the room before finally looking back at Aiden. “I guess I was. I’m sorry, I don’t know… I’m not sure how to handle this. It’s not something I’ve ever had to deal with. It’s like…” Nigel scratched at his stubble for a moment. “It’s like if you know someone and they die but then you meet the sibling they never told you about, and they are so similar and it’s weird because you have these memories and you can’t recall who they are with, the sibling or the dead person-”

“I’m not dead Nigel,” Aiden snapped quietly, frowning. Nigel looked away again, back at the beer sat in front of him. No angry response, no immediate defensiveness.

“No, you’re not. Sorry I didn’t… I didn’t mean it like that,” Nigel said.

“Yeah, you did,” Aiden replied softly. No accusation, just an acknowledgement.

Nigel looked at him, eyes full of sorrow, “I guess I did. It’s… It felt like I was messaging with the same person, with Gabi and now,” he shook his head.

“I’m still the same person, Nigel,” Aiden wanted to scream it in his face, but instead he said it gently, “If anything I’m more me than I’ve ever been. Same likes and dislikes, same tastes and desires.”

Nigel nodded, “I can see that, I understand that. But the reality of it… When I read those texts it was like rolling back time five years. There’s a disconnect in my brain and I’m not sure how to get over it.”

“You don’t have to,” Aiden wanted to reach for Nigel and comfort him. Right or wrong, to him this was a loss, a bereavement of sorts and that wasn’t something people just got over. “We don’t have to have any further contact. You can even pretend I don’t exist if you like,” Aiden forced a chuckle, “I promise that’s okay.”

Nigel looked so sad at those words, and not just for himself, but for Aiden as well.

“I… Is that what you want?” Nigel asked.

Aiden chuckled again, “Nigel asking me what I want… You’re the one who has changed.”

Nigel softened at that, grinned and relaxed a little.

“True, I try to keep my inner asshole in check as much as possible now, believe it or not.”

“I believe it,” Aiden replied with a soft smile.

Nigel frowned for a moment and looked slightly uncomfortable before repeating, “I need to know what you want.”

Aiden took in a deep breath and let it out sharply, looking back down at his hands.

“Honestly? I don’t know. I keep thinking I do. Keep thinking I just want closure, want you to react like you did at the bar and be done with it. Know that if I’d stayed it would never have worked, you would have left me. But then part of my brain thinks about our messages, the last few months and I think why the hell can’t we at least be friends? Even though I know that will be painful and torture and I just can’t-”

“I don’t want you to feel tortured. I don’t want you to think I hate you, I don’t. Really, I-” Nigel started, turning in the seat a little to face Aiden more directly.

Tears were stinging the corners of Aiden’s eyes now and his voice was little more than a whisper as he shook his head, knowing he really couldn’t be anything other than honest now - the truth was all they had.

“It wouldn’t be torture because I think you hate me, that I’m forcing you into something when you’d rather avoid me. It… It would be torture because I never stopped loving you. And I thought I was over you, and maybe I was, but then we started messaging and I… I fell in love with you all over again, and it’s breaking my heart.”

Aiden’s words hurt, his throat ached.

He shook his head, trying not to let the tears come, trying to dismiss everything he’d just said. Everything he knew it was unfair to lay on Nigel.

“I’m sorry,” He managed to croak out before getting to his feet and hurrying to the bathroom. He bolted the door behind him and sank to the floor, trying not to cry as loudly as he was sure he was.

*

When Aiden had spoken so softly, so gently, Nigel had wanted to hold him. And not because the words, the slightly lighter pitch, reminded him of Gabi but because he cared about Aiden. Maybe not the same way, but he cared that this guy was hurting. He cared that he had some responsibility in that.

Damn, he cared that the guy was so cut up about all this he’d locked himself in the bathroom to cry.

Nigel’s first instinct was to leave, that was maybe what Aiden wanted. To be alone, to find the apartment empty when he returned. But Nigel wasn’t able to do that. Aiden was right

about the closure, they needed that and if it wasn't now then how much longer would it drag on?

He was right about the love too.

The fucking love. It always drove Nigel somewhat insane.

He knew he could be obsessive when it came to love, he knew he had been with Gabi. Not just back then, but these last few months since they'd been messaging. He'd been crazy for her, and that crazy was back and it wasn't something he could just switch off.

But Gabi wasn't Gabi anymore. Gabi was Aiden.

Nigel wasn't gay, or even a little bi as far as he was aware, and Aiden was definitely a guy.

A guy he sort of loved... A guy he was in love with.

Nigel got to his feet and considered for a moment downing the rest of the bottle of beer, considered walking away - it was just too hard. But instead he stalked to the bathroom. They had to deal with all this.

He tapped lightly on the door.

"Aiden… I'd like for us to talk," Nigel spoke softly to the closed door, "Please?"

There was a little shuffling, then Aiden blowing his nose, before finally the lock opened. The door didn't move and after a moment Nigel turned the handle and let himself in.

Aiden was sat on the edge of the bathtub, a little obscured by the shower curtain that fell partially between them.

"Hey," Nigel greeted and took a seat on the closed toilet, almost opposite Aiden. He leaned forward resting his elbows on his knees as he looked at the man before him.

"So I guess this is all kinda fucked up," Nigel acknowledged, trying to sound light hearted. "Look, I… I can't just turn my feelings off either. I never stopped loving Gabi and I'm trying to reconcile the fact that Gabi is now Aiden, and I'm not sure how I feel about that. But I don't hate you, I do want to be your friend and I hate that you're in pain."

Aiden looked at him then, his eyes red rimmed and watery, his mouth turned down and lip quivering.

Nigel stood and held out his hand to help Aiden up, "Can we go back to the sofa?"

Aiden nodded and took his hand. The feel of it was so fucking good in his own. Familiar and different at the same time, just like everything with Aiden. It was like coming home but having moved house - all the trappings were there but the facade had changed.

A fucking stupid analogy, Nigel thought, but it felt true. He just wasn't sure how to deal with the change.

Once Aiden was on his feet, Nigel let go. And fuck, if that wasn't the hardest thing he'd done all day. He wondered if he could just close his eyes and pretend it was Gabi?

He was angry the moment he thought it, sick at himself. Conflicted. Part of him wanted that but he knew how fucked up it was. If he wanted Gabi then he had Aiden, if he didn't want Aiden he could fuck off, it was that simple.

What wasn't simple was deciding.

They got back to the sofa and Nigel sat at one end, this time Aiden sitting near the middle. It made him smile, having expecting him to take the far end again. He felt a sort of relief at it.

Nigel cleared his throat, knowing they needed to clear the air and that it was going to be on him to do his bit in that.

"You just… you disappeared. Everything was through your lawyer and so fast. I assumed you had someone new in your life," Nigel spoke softly, not wanting it to sound like an accusation.

Aiden shook his head, his curls moving a little like Gabi's had when they'd first met. Her hair had been a comparable length last time he'd seen her, but she dyed it and took great pains in straightening it. And whilst Nigel had found it attractive, Aiden was more real somehow. More authentic. He couldn't deny he was sort of beautiful - in all the ways he looked like Gabi and all the ways he didn't.

"I… I needed the divorce," Aiden said quietly, looking down at his hands yet again. "To transition. To legally change my gender. It's the law, or it was at the time. If you were married and wanted to transition then your spouse had to give permission, legally signed permission."

Aiden seemed to tense, as if waiting for Nigel's reaction, avoiding his eyes.

"What the fuck?" Nigel growled, "that's fucked up. A person isn't a piece of meat. Needed permission? Fuck that," he wasn't able to hide his anger that Aiden had had to deal with that.

He hated the thought of Aiden having had to deal with any of the bullshit he seemed to have.

And maybe Aiden understood that because he looked up, a small smile of thanks on his lips.

"I can't begin to imagine the sort of shit you've gone through the last few years, I wish…" He trailed off, because he was so fucking close to saying he wished he'd been there. And whilst, in the here and now, part of him knew that to be true, he couldn't say how he would have reacted back then. If he had known, he wasn't sure it wouldn't have gone the way Aiden had suspected. He probably would have left, probably would have got high and carried on getting high until his body gave out.

Aiden shrugged and looked away, as though the fight had gone from him. As though it were just too fucking hard to exist sometimes. Nigel knew that well enough, at his lowest point with the drugs he'd felt it. Not that he was comparing the two situations, but life being just too damn much sometimes wasn't anyone's specific cross to bear.

Nigel reached over and took hold of Aiden's hand. He hadn't even thought about it, an automatic reaction to that sadness.

Aiden looked back to him sharply, frowning.

"I, I can't…" Aiden started, pulling his hand back. Nigel nodded, understanding. He wasn't sure he could either. Wasn't sure he could allow himself to be tactile even if only platonically. It was all too confusing.

Nigel clenched his empty fist on his knee, watching as Aiden seemed to shrink further into himself.

And then it wasn't too fucking confusing at all. It was so fucking simple in that moment, even if might not be in a minute or an hour or day. It wasn't fucking confusing at all that he wanted to reach out and take hold of someone, comfort someone, that he loved.

Nigel moved slowly along the sofa, Aiden frowning at him and seeming a little wary as he did so. He moved as slowly as he could, watching for any sign or any word from Aiden to stop, to fuck off. But it didn't come, instead he moved until he was sat right alongside the man, gently slipping an arm around his shoulders.

Friends comforted friends all the time. Hugged them all the time. Right?

And then Aiden let out a shuddering breath and relaxed against him, melted into him. Aiden's head fell onto Nigel's chest and he burrowed into his side like Gabi had done so many fucking times.

In that moment it really did feel like coming home. In that moment it was all so fucking simple.

Chapter End Notes

regarding the divorce/legislation - so I've sort of set this all in vaguesville, but this is based in a bit of truth. I don't know about elsewhere but in the UK if you wish to get the Gender Recognition Certificate and you're married then your spouse has to give their legal permission. This is currently one of the things the Government has under review and hopefully in the future will not be the case.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

"Maybe we could go on a date?"

Aiden woke with a slight ache in his neck, not a crick, but a little discomfort from having slept at a weird angle. Maybe his pillows were too high?

He'd have to ask Nigel if he slept okay.

Aiden's eyes opened wide and his brain suddenly and jarringly raced from five years ago to today.

It had felt so familiar to be curled up with his husband - ex-husband - that his brain had tricked him. Or so it seemed.

Aiden knew he should sit up, wake Nigel, but he found he didn't want to. He was frozen there in time, in Nigel's arms as they lay sprawled against each other on the large sofa.

The last thing he had remembered was Nigel holding him. He'd felt safe and loved and his eyes hurt, he was exhausted. It must have only been minutes before he had fallen asleep. And now it was likely hours later, and they had somehow shifted to lying out on the sofa, but still entwined.

Part of his brain told Aiden just to savour it, pretend he was asleep until Nigel woke and freaked out or whatever he was going to do.

He suddenly found himself wondering if Santa was bi, or whether he'd experienced some sort of 'straight panic' when his then husband had started to transition into the woman she was always meant to be. The thought poked and prodded at his brain.

Nigel stirred and pulled him closer, as he let out the little contented hum that Aiden hadn't realised he'd missed.

Aiden clenched his jaw, knowing that he had to wake Nigel, this was unfair. Just as unfair as all those texts had been when Nigel had thought he was Gabi.

And then Nigel went rigid. He'd clearly woken and realised his situation.

Aiden felt sick, felt fed up with feeling so fucking sick with nerves over this whole mess.

It was a moment before Nigel began to relax, or at least the tension wasn't as great. What he was feeling or thinking was anyone's guess, but so far he hadn't had an over the top or

violent reaction, for which Aiden was grateful.

Nigel cleared his throat and Aiden waited for the inevitable rejection.

“Is this okay?” Is what Nigel said instead.

The words sent butterflies through Aiden’s entire body. Did Nigel want this? Was he okay with them falling asleep in each other’s arms?

“We fell asleep,” Aiden said, dumbly. He rolled his eyes at himself and was glad to feel Nigel chuckle against him rather than be repulsed by his voice - by the reminder this was Aiden not Gabi.

“Yeah,” Nigel agreed, humour still in his tone. “Is that okay? Shall I… should I go? I don’t want things to get…”

“Confusing?” Aiden asked, trying to sound light but not really feeling it through the suddenly crushing trepidation.

“Yeah, I… I guess I don’t want to make things awkward, I don’t want you to be uncomfortable, but I… I want to…” Nigel trailed off as though trying to find the words. He let out a long sigh, not letting his arms around Aiden loosen as he continued, “I like you, a lot. I mean… I love you I guess. I have to, right? I can’t have loved Gabi and loved the person messaging me and not love you. But I don’t know what that means, I just know I want to find out. But if you’re not comfortable with that, then we shouldn’t… I should leave.”

Aiden was breathing heavily, feeling winded by the words.

Nigel must have taken that to mean something as he started to move, started to pull away, but Aiden clung to him.

“Wait!” Aiden didn’t mean to say it as loudly as he did, “I don’t want things to be awkward or confusing. But that might be inevitable. You’re not gay and I’m not a woman. Isn’t it inevitable?”

“I don’t know,” Nigel said softly, even as he started to soothingly run a hand up and down Aiden’s back. “Will you let me find out?”

For Aiden the confusion was already setting in. The want and desire mixed in with fear and reality. Wasn’t it inevitable that this would go the way Aiden always knew it would have if he’d stayed? That eventually there would have been a line that Nigel wasn’t comfortable crossing - the limits of his heterosexuality.

“Wh-what are you suggesting?” Aiden asked, slightly nervous at the answer. Part of him wanted to be intimate with Nigel, explore each other’s bodies anew and make each other come. But a bigger part of him was self conscious of his body, of the bits that still were a little too feminine and didn’t feel right. He wasn’t sure he could just jump straight into bed with the man, knowing that he was nothing like Gabi, but equally probably nothing like Nigel was imagining him to be. He couldn’t take that disappointment.

He really couldn't take the potential disappointment of becoming intimate and then Nigel discovering that line he couldn't cross the moment he saw Aiden naked, or when he was inside him. The thought hurt of that hurt so much.

So Aiden was a little surprised and very relieved when Nigel finally replied, "Maybe we could go on a date?"

*

After they had got up and used the bathroom, had breakfast and Aiden had replied to a text from his boss asking him where the fuck he was, Nigel had left.

He'd been sort of relieved to leave because the casual domesticity was a little weird in how easy it was. Not the same as before, as when they were married. It felt familiar enough, but new.

Nigel had never known how guys could be domestic with each other like that. Never really got it when he saw two guys together in adverts or on TV, but now he did. At least in that it was no fucking different to being with a woman. Just two people living together who love each other, had a life together.

And that realisation had been pretty fucking overwhelming and too damn real.

So when Aiden said he needed to get to work, Nigel nodded and said he should do the same even though he was on the evening shift that night.

If he was completely honest with himself, he would never have suggested they go on a date had they been looking at each other. Had Aiden been in view and the very real reminder of his being male, would be evident. As it was, with them pressed together in a way he had been longing for since Gabi left, it had been all too easy to let his mind run away with him and his fucking mouth follow after.

He wasn't sure how Aiden felt, but between that and the easy and casual breakfast together, Nigel was feeling a bit weirded out. It was like he was watching someone else living out his life, because this sort of surreal shit didn't happen to him.

Was there some kind of support group for people who found out their exes had transitioned?

The thought was facetious, but then he wondered if that actually was something he should look into if he really was going to go ahead with this date.

And was he?

He spent the whole time in the bathroom trying to plan out the words of how to renege, and then over breakfast had decided not to do that. But now, driving back to his own apartment he was thinking over again how he could back out of this. Texting would be fucking cowardly, but a phone call didn't feel much better.

Every time he tried to write the text in his head it was bullshit. Saying he didn't think it would work out, they have nothing in common, too much water under the bridge. Every

fucking bit of that was a lie, so he could only tell the truth - I'm not gay.

Whilst it was true, it felt like a fucking shitty thing to say after having gotten this far. He never thought in his life he'd be a cocktease, but wasn't that the case? If he told Aiden he wanted to go on a date, and then the same day said, actually sorry I'm not gay, no dice?

It would be fucking shitty thing to do...

*

When Aiden had gotten into work, almost a half day late, Freddie had called him to her office and tore him a new one. And then sat back in her chair and steepled her fingers, giving him a knowing grin as she then told him to spill, as it didn't take an investigative reporter to realise something was going on. She assumed he'd got laid the night before, but Aiden explained a little of what had actually happened. No finer details, just reconnecting with an ex from before he transitioned and potentially going on a date. She had grinned and told him not to be fucking late again.

From her office he'd gone to grab a coffee and then get into work. But every moment in between his mind would go back to Nigel and the *potential* date.

He couldn't consider it anything more than that at this point. In fact he had been sure that Nigel would preemptively cancel over breakfast, but that hadn't happened and now it was lunchtime.

As much as Aiden wanted this, he also was sure Nigel didn't and had no idea why the man had decided to ask for a date. And all the things that meant. A date, dating, becoming involved, a relationship - a replay of all those years ago.

Problem was, Nigel wasn't gay, so Aiden just couldn't at all fathom - after months of wanting - how the hell this would pan out.

*

A day after their impromptu sleepover, Nigel got a text from Aiden giving him the chance to back out of the date with no hard feelings. Nigel stood in his kitchen after a thankfully busy but not overwhelming shift, and read the message over and over.

Despite having up until then been considering how to say the same thing himself, he found he was disappointed. More than that, he felt jarred and a tight pain ran through him. With the date now in question, he found he wanted it. He fucking wanted it. Maybe he even wanted Aiden?

And that was such a mind fuck. But it was what it was.

He had loved Gabi, did love Gabi. Loved the person he had been texting. Was in love with them and he wasn't sure he could turn that off, be not in love with someone just because they weren't as he'd thought. And yeah, maybe if Aiden hadn't been Gabi and they hadn't had that history then it would have been different. In fact, it likely would have been very different.

But they did have that history and maybe that was why he was sort of attracted to Aiden too.

A real fucking mindfuck!

It wasn't because of the little ways in which he looked like Gabi, it was his fucking personality first off. The things they'd messaged about, the fun that had been - telling himself that was Aiden, trying to retrain his brain to that fact, had him forming this adoration he'd always had for Gabi.

Nigel scrubbed a hand roughly over his face, knowing he had to admit it to himself, if nothing else - that it wasn't just that either...

That he loved his fucking lips, wanted to kiss them. Actually *wanted* to feel the sensation of his light stubble. And even though that was out of curiosity he had this idea that he might like it. It had been at the back of his mind from the moment he left Aiden at that bar, his mind taking him to all possible outcomes, several of which featured them being intimate in some way.

"Fuck!" He slammed the phone onto the kitchen counter, not really sure where the sudden outburst of rage had bubbled up from. It shocked him, he wasn't prone to such aggression these days and yet…

He wanted to think that Aiden brought it out in him, another reason that maybe he should steer clear for both their sakes. But he knew that was a fucking lie the second he thought it.

"Fucking liar. Just… fucking grow a pair of balls you fucking asshole," Nigel mumbled to himself, clenching his fists tight.

He was angry at himself, at the resistance he had to Aiden.

Okay, so he wasn't gay. He'd never thought of a guy like that before. But he fucking was now, he fucking was thinking about what Aiden's stubble would feel like against his own, what his masculine hand would feel like wrapped around his cock.

"Fuck!" Nigel slammed his fist onto the counter, wincing as he felt the semi-boner he was already sporting.

He was angry at the text, not Aiden, but the idea of cancelling the date and not having this. Being back at square one or even less than that. He didn't want to push Aiden into anything, but he had come to realise in the last day - even if it had taken getting the message to admit it - that he might fucking go insane if he didn't hold Aiden in his arms again some time soon.

Nigel took a few calming breaths, trying to process all this overwhelming shit.

He was constantly being torn. His brain wanting one thing then another, his heart doing the same. His fucking cock doing the same. One minute wondering what it would feel like to have Aiden's lips wrapped around his length, the next repulsed by the idea because he's fucking straight!

On impulse he grabbed up the phone again, not even sure what he was going to write until he did, until he pressed send.

~I'm still interested if you are

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Nigel takes Aiden on the date he planned...

Chapter Notes

Content Warning for this chapter: guns and shooting of guns in a controlled environment (shooting range).
Content Warning also for fear of transphobic behaviour/violence but none takes place.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aiden wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry.

A few texts later and Nigel had said he was going to organise the whole thing and just to leave it with him. They would go on a date Saturday afternoon and into the evening and then go from there.

Aiden had smiled and thought about when they'd first got together and taken a picnic to a beach or to the zoo. Wondering if Nigel would do something like that and unsure how he would feel about the call back to their previous time together and who they'd been back then.

But, as he stood being signed in as a guest at the reception desk of the shooting range, Aiden realised he needn't have worried about that.

Nigel had always had a thing for guns, and whilst Aiden didn't share it, he had to admit there had been times he'd found it sexy. When they were together Nigel had owned a replica handgun and Aiden fondly remembered the time he'd been sat on the sofa reading and then felt it against his ankle. Nigel had moved it up to his thigh, muttering dirty shit about what a bad man he was and all the things he'd do to such a sweet innocent little thing, before they'd fucked so hard the sofa almost broke.

That was then.

Now, Nigel was apparently a member at a shooting range and his idea of a date was to bring Aiden here for the afternoon. And then they'd be going straight out to dinner after, but Aiden wasn't sure he was going to make it that far.

Maybe he'd entirely misjudged Nigel. For one thing, he couldn't help but wonder if Nigel already had this in his calendar and didn't want to cancel so decided to just bring Aiden along. It was the sort of selfish shit he'd pulled now and then.

But he really hadn't expected this from the Nigel he'd gotten to know again in recent months.

Nigel finished signing them in and flashed him a grin that he couldn't really return, but Nigel seemed not to notice.

"I love this place. Been coming here the last couple of years and it's great for anger management. Like… they don't fuck around here. They don't like hot heads, they don't want one of their members to turn out as one of those assholes you hear about on the news. So that shit is sort of kindly stripped out of you at the same time as they're acknowledging that it's a good way to blow off steam. But the fact is, you've got to focus, you can't *be* a hot head, and that was something I needed I guess…" Nigel trailed off into thought, though likely not because he realised he was just talking at Aiden this whole time.

That said, Aiden softened a little. This place clearly meant something to Nigel and was part of him getting healthy from the sounds of it, maybe he just wanted to share that?

Aiden felt like an asshole and decided to throw himself into the whole thing for Nigel's sake.

They were given ear protectors and goggles and sent out to the range, where an instructor waited and spent a little time going over gun safety before even letting one touch Aiden's hands. It was heavier than he was expecting and it felt so alien. Something he'd never planned on holding in his life.

It really wasn't at all sexy.

Nigel's smile that lit up face on the other hand, was. He seemed so excited to be doing this, so Aiden just leaned into that.

The instructor stayed with them a while and showed Aiden what to do, warned him of the kick and then had him shoot a few shots. He missed the target completely but Nigel seemed impressed anyway.

"Hey, Nige, you want to take over. Show your friend some stances? I've got a new registration coming in at 5," The instructor spoke to Nigel over Aiden's head.

"Oh, sure." Nigel agreed.

"Great, thanks bud." The guy swung his hand out to Nigel and they shook firmly before he turned to do the same to Aiden. They clasped hands and shook in the most manliest way Aiden was sure he'd ever been exposed to.

"See you again buddy," The instructor gave them both a nod before leaving.

"Do you bring friends here a lot?" Aiden found himself asking.

“No, just you… I thought…” Nigel seemed unsure of himself for a moment and then cleared his throat. “So, the main stances are Weaver and Isosceles, but there are variations. We could try out both and see which you find works better for you.”

Nigel moved behind him then and got Aiden to lift his gun up to the target, “Before was Isosceles, so lets try the Weaver,” Nigel moved so he was standing directly behind Aiden, moving forward until their bodies were pressed together.

His arms came up to Aiden’s and started to rearrange him, bending him at the elbow.

It was all Aiden could do not to melt back into the man, but then Nigel cleared his throat again and backed up in a hurry just as Aiden realised the instructor was walking behind their booth, leading someone to the next one to get set up.

“Go ahead,” Nigel told him, words clipped and Aiden wondered if he was angry. At himself? At Aiden? There was something there and Aiden helpfully supplied the likely reason - Nigel didn’t want people to think he was gay by standing with Aiden that way.

The thought shouldn’t have shook him as much as it did. Maybe because the date had been Nigel’s idea and so he guessed Nigel had come to terms with it in some way, even if not fully.

It was disappointing and disheartening.

Aiden swallowed and tried to focus on the target. Finally he squeezed the trigger, closing his eyes as he did so.

When he opened them the paper target was swinging and Aiden appeared to have skimmed close enough to cause the breeze, but hadn’t hit it.

“That was closer! Keep going,” Nigel encouraged.

Aiden held up the gun again and realised his hand was shaking, just slightly but enough to make this all so much harder.

He was more upset than he had any right to be over Nigel’s hesitation. The man had only just admitted to himself he had fallen in love with another man. This was always going to take time.

The talking to he was giving himself didn’t matter, Aiden was already shutting down on this whole thing. This fucking machismo. The shooting range, the ‘no homo’, it was all a bit too much for this little queer boy, Aiden decided.

He put the gun down.

“I… I’m sorry, I’m not… Is it okay if we go?” Aiden asked quietly.

Nigel’s expression was unreadable. He dragged his bottom lip with his teeth but there was no aggression with it, he didn’t seem pissed off or put out but clearly wasn’t happy either.

He just gave a curt nod.

*

Nigel wasn't sure at which point it became painfully clear that he had fucked up the entire date. But that was the case.

At first he hadn't been sure whether Aiden wanted to leave the shooting range because he just wasn't enjoying it, or maybe didn't like guns? Other than that one time, Gabi had been pretty much against them. He'd never been fucking brave enough to tell her it wasn't a replica, but something that he was increasingly carrying on deals.

He had briefly considered Aiden might not be into it before he had booked the slot, but he had dismissed it easily. Guys liked guns, right? He really wanted to show he was supportive of Aiden being a man, and doing manly things.

It was whilst they were having dinner that he realised there were mistakes pilling up.

Nigel rarely came to this bar, it wasn't really his scene, but he had come a few times to watch pay per view boxing matches. Otherwise, a sports bar wasn't somewhere he spent a lot of time.

When they had arrived Aiden had eyed him with incredulity, and Nigel had nearly suggested they go somewhere else. That would likely have been the correct option, instead he barralled into the mistake of taking Aiden on a date to a pretty shitty, machismo infused, rowdy sports bar.

There was some sort of football on the big screen televisions dotted around the place and the almost entirely male patrons were drunk, loud and enthusiastic for their team.

Despite how busy it was they managed to find a little booth toward the back, behind a pillar, which gave almost no view of any of the televisions, hence it's availability.

Aiden looked uncomfortable.

He looked more than uncomfortable, he looked fucking scared.

That shook Nigel, as did Aiden's throwaway comment, as he chuckled - clearly trying to laugh at the whole thing, "I don't think I've ever been in a room with so many drunk cis men in my life," his smile didn't reach his eyes and faded fast.

Nigel was about to say that they could go if he wanted, when a cry went up over a goal scored.

Aiden jumped and Nigel wished he was sitting next to him not opposite him so he could put his arm around him and comfort him. Apologise and remove him from the place.

Nigel went rigid at the thought.

He hated it, but part of him wasn't sure he was ever going to feel comfortable enough, love Aiden enough, to give that affection in public. Maybe not even in private.

His chest constricted with anger, at himself and the situation. He hated that he gave a fuck about this. That he might always second guess his desire to be close to Aiden and stamp on it before it could happen.

He thought he'd made the right move today with the shooting range and the bar. That it would show he was supportive and understanding and instead he'd fucked up on every level.

"Let's go," Nigel said as Aiden reached for the sticky menu at the end of the table.

He looked up, a mixture of frustration and relief.

"This place is the pits, sorry. Let's go somewhere else."

Aiden didn't say anything, just rose and started back out of the bar, past the raucous sports fans. Nigel quickly followed, and was glad of the quiet once they got out into the fresh air.

"There's this bistro-" Nigel started to say, wondering aloud whether the little bistro he'd passed before at the end of the street was any good, but Aiden shook his head.

"No, I… I just want to go home." Aiden told him, his tone flat.

"I… Shit," Nigel shook his head, "I've fucked this up."

When he looked at Aiden he saw a scowl that was a shadow of one he'd seen so many times before. All the times when he'd really really fucked up - usually whilst high.

"I just… I don't know what you were… I don't know what this is all about," Aiden was clearly struggling through both anger and upset to find the words, and it fucking hurt. "Did this seem like a real date option to you or were you just trying to keep me at arms length? We could have seen a movie, had a quiet dinner, or even just ordered pizza and hung out on my sofa but you didn't want the risk of that intimacy, right?"

"No, that's-"

"Save it Nigel, this was clearly a really stupid idea, but now it's done. Now we know."

"You always say that, that we know and there's closure. There hasn't been any fucking closure yet darling," Nigel growled softly, "we don't know anything. I don't know a damn thing. I'm still trying to work it all out and today I fucked up. That's all I know."

That seemed to take the bluster out of Aiden, but Nigel realised he looked small and pale, he looked like he was turning in on himself somehow and in a moment might vanish.

"I don't know either," Aiden's voice was broken.

"I… I was trying to… ugh. I fucked it all up, I should have asked what you wanted, but I got it in my head. I was trying to be supportive. Do guy things, be cool with you being a guy, and do things you might enjoy now. And… I get it, you don't have to tell me I got that completely fucking wrong."

Aiden frowned at him, studying him. Scrutinising.

“I’m going to get a cab,” Aiden said finally and started down the road.

Nigel took a moment to decide whether it was best to go after him or not, but his heart made the decision before his brain got a look in, so he took off after him.

“Aiden, wait.” Nigel caught up with him just as a cab pulled to the kerb. “Look, I… I get your mad and upset and you have every right to be. But please don’t… Maybe we can try again, another night. You choose the place.”

Aiden opened the cab door but didn’t get in, considering for a moment before nodding.

“Okay, I choose.”

Nigel smiled, fucking grinned and felt his chest heave with the relief.

Without thought he pulled Aiden into a hug, holding him against his chest and wrapping his arms around him.

At the contact they both took a deep breath. Nigel hadn’t been thinking at all but now his mind was filled with Aiden. With the feel of him against him again, the whole reason he’d asked for a date in the first place. How good this felt, both the familiar and unfamiliar. Nigel closed his eyes and buried his nose in Aiden’s hair, taking in the citrus shampoo. Gabi had always liked citrus shampoo - it made sense they had the same taste.

“Mm, limes,” Nigel found himself muttering.

Aiden pulled back sharply, seemingly startled by the over familiarity of it all. He jumped in the cab and closed the door, gone without second glance.

Chapter End Notes

This seemed like a good chapter to include this amazing work by A Marriage Of True Minds from a couple of weeks ago. I'm blown away and so excited my story inspired someone else to be creative :D

You can check it out, along with a whole bunch of fantastic variants here and here on twitter and/or their tumblr, please go give you love!!

BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE
CHARLIE COUNTRYMAN
AIDEN NIGEL
TIGER RAW

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

dinner, leather daddies and kissing.

Chapter Notes

CW: mention a few paragraphs in of transphobic slurs, not actually used at someone.

Aiden somehow understood what Nigel had been attempting. And though it had gone wrong and also was not really the coolest thing to do, Aiden got where he was coming from. In some ways it was sort of touching that he wanted to try and share guy things with Aiden, it was just off the mark was all.

And that never felt clearer than when Nigel hugged him and smelled his shampoo. The same one he'd been using for years. The one Gabi had used.

Same tastes, same interests. For the most part.

That had been fucking rough, putting the whole evening into sharp perspective and he couldn't do that again. He needed to be in control and know what was going on. He needed to feel safe and comfortable, but he also needed Nigel to understand that the bits of him that had changed had always been inside Gabi, he'd just never seen them.

Aiden wanted to show these things to Nigel, knowing that it could definitely become a make or break situation. Maybe Nigel wasn't ready? But he might never be ready and Aiden needed to know that now, not in a month or a year.

Aiden knew exactly the date to plan.

*

Nigel felt out of his element, and wondered if this was anything like what Aiden had gone through on their last date. The difference was, he had to admit to himself, whilst he wasn't used to or entirely comfortable with being leered at by scantily clad men, he didn't feel that he was in any kind of danger.

He still felt shit over that, seeing the fear in Aiden's eyes, and his own lack of awareness that perhaps Aiden had had a hard time in the past with guys like that. Guys like himself even.

And didn't that just fucking chew at him? He'd never said anything out loud, but sure there had been times when he'd seen people and judged them, inwardly sneered. Were they a butch dyke? Were they a tranny?

He fucking hated that word now. Hated that it had ever been in his head.

Nigel had never been more relieved to see someone when Aiden walked in the door. Partly because he was just glad to have company before some big burly guy that was giving him the eye came on over. And partly because he was half worried that Aiden wouldn't show at all. That having them meet at a gay bar and then standing him up, might have been some sort of payback.

But he knew Aiden wouldn't be as spiteful as to set him up like that - stand him up in a gay bar to teach him a lesson.

Aiden smiled when he saw him, a sort of shy smile like maybe he thought Nigel wouldn't turn up either, despite the many assurances via text over the last week.

"Hey," Aiden said quietly, as he got to Nigel.

"Shall I get you a drink?" Nigel asked, having to raise his voice a little over the chatter in the bar.

Aiden shook his head and Nigel's stomach dropped for a moment, thinking maybe he might get dumped after all.

"I just thought it would be easier to meet here, I didn't know how well you know this end of town," Aiden had to lean in close to not have to shout over the noise.

And fuck that felt good. Took everything Nigel had not to pull their bodies tight together, open his legs where he sat on the barstool and pull Aiden between them so that they could get as close as possible.

He wasn't even going to try to deny that he been thinking more and more everyday about holding Aiden since the last time. It was almost overwhelming now.

"Huh?" Nigel shook himself from his thoughts, realising that Aiden had still been talking but he had spaced out on it.

Aiden chuckled, "Getting distracted by the local wildlife?" He looked over his shoulder at some of the other guys at the bar, many of which gave Aiden a small wave or nod of greeting.

"No, I… Uh…" He desperately wanted to be truthful. If this had been Gabi, he'd have pulled her roughly to him and growled in her ear exactly what was distracting him and what he thought they should do about it.

And as much as he knew he wanted to fucking do just that, he also knew he was in no way ready to do that.

Aiden chuckled again and just seemed… so relaxed and comfortable. It made Nigel feel good.

“We have reservations at a restaurant in the next street, but we’ll come back here later,” The last sounded like a warning, or maybe a tease. Either way Nigel’s cock gave a little twitch, which he wasn’t sure he was mad about.

He followed Aiden out of the bar and into the quiet cold air outside.

“This is kind of the gay part of town. The restaraunt isn’t exclusively LGBTQ but the owners are gay and so most of the customers are. It’s quiet, nice.” Aiden was starting to sound like he was trying to sell him the place so Nigel felt the need to interject.

“It sounds great! Quiet would be good,” He replied as they started to walk.

Aiden smiled back at him over his shoulder, half a pace ahead, and Nigel had to restrain himself from reaching out and taking the man’s hand.

Maybe they could do that?

Everyone in this neighbourhood was gay, no one was going to give a shit. And it wasn’t like anyone he knew would see them.

The thought jarred him and he felt kinda winded. Was he really so fucking hung up on what others might think of this? He clenched his jaw, knowing he fucking was and hating it. Another fucking layer to this mindfuck.

The moment passed and Nigel clenched his fists, knowing he wasn’t going to hold Aiden’s hand. Not right now. Later? Ugh.

*

The meal was amazing.

They’d been given one of the little corner booths at the back of the long, dark restaurant, so they had no choice but to sit next to each other, rather than opposite.

The food, as always was spectacular, and Nigel had clearly enjoyed it. Aiden had chuckled and batted him away as he’d tried to eat some of Aiden’s food too.

It felt so easy and casual and he couldn’t help his constant, now aching smile, in response to Nigel’s. Grinning at each other like loons as they talked and joked and fended each other from their plates.

When the waiter came over to ask if they wanted dessert, Aiden almost replied that he’d have Nigel for dessert later, stopping himself just as he was about to open his mouth. It was something he’d said so many times in the past, and he was glad that rather than make him feel melancholy or anxious, it made him chuckle. He wondered what Nigel’s face would have looked like if he’d said it.

“I’m stuffed,” Aiden managed instead. Which had been a mistake - another poor choice of words - as Nigel had chosen that moment to take a sip of his pint and nearly inhaled it through his nose as he guffawed.

Aiden burst out laughing, his whole body shaking as he knew immediately the thought running through Nigel’s mind - the words he had also said many times in the past - *you think so? Wait until I get you home!*

Nigel tried to recover, putting his pint down and picking up his napkin to wipe the spill from his face. His entire face was beginning to bloom red and the desperate look in his eyes told Aiden he was really hoping Aiden didn’t know exactly what words had popped into his head.

Aiden couldn’t help but pull back his chuckling into a smirk and give a knowing look.

“Fuck,” Nigel muttered and hung his head in his hands.

“We’re good, thanks, just the bill,” Aiden tried not to laugh again as he told the waiter, who looked something between confused and amused, walked away.

“I didn’t… I mean, I thought it as a reaction, but I didn’t mean anything by it,” Nigel started, still not looking up.

“Nigel,” Aiden chuckled, “it’s fine. I didn’t even realise until I said it and then…” he subsided into fits of giggles again.

“You’re a fucking terror,” Nigel said, finally looking up. He was trying to scowl but his lips kept twitching into a grin. They both laughed for a moment before fading into wide smiles.

This felt so nice, really so good, to be like this with each other. Aiden didn’t want to admit it out loud in case it broke something between them, but he was sure Nigel felt it too.

“So what’s next?” Nigel asked, “Because I should tell you I already saw that terrible movie with that tall one with the beard, so I’m not going to see that again.”

Aiden frowned for a moment before realising Nigel was talking about a particular actor that he knew Aiden had been fond of when they were together. He knew this because he’d dragged Nigel to several, and mostly awful, movies just in order to get his fix of the man.

“Oh god!” Aiden groaned, embarrassed by the reminder. “Why the hell did you ever indulge me in that?” He was laughing again and now his face really was hurting.

Nigel shrugged, smirking, “Couldn’t deny you anything, could I?” It was meant as a joke, but there was an edge of affection that Aiden decided to ignore. Not sure if either of them were ready for that.

But… apparently they were!

Because, as Aiden tried to turn it into more of a joke and gave Nigel a playful shove, Nigel caught his hand and pulled it into his own.

Aiden took an immediate and sharp breath, closing his eyes as Nigel rubbed his thumb back and forth, delicately entwining their fingers.

When Aiden opened his eyes again, breathing a little faster, Nigel was looking at him intently. His eyes, his mouth and then up to his hair. Nigel reached out his free hand and stroked a curl back from Aiden's forehead before leaning in close to whisper, "Can I kiss you?"

Aiden felt himself trembling and he swallowed so hard it hurt, but he nodded all the same.

Nigel smiled, thankful it seemed, and leaned in to press their lips gently together. His free hand moved to Aiden's cheek and stroked over the stubble there.

He waited for every second of the fairly chaste kiss, for Nigel to freak out, but he didn't.

Even so, when Aiden parted his lips to deepen the kiss, Nigel pulled back and looked away. He was breathing heavily and hanging onto Aiden's hand for dear life.

"Nigel?"

"Sorry, I… Was that okay? I wanted to, but I… can we take this slow?"

Aiden wasn't sure he'd ever seen Nigel look so vulnerable, not even when he was freaking out after some bad drugs. He managed a smile and nodded.

"Of course, I… I don't want to rush you. And I want anything that happens between us to happen because we are both into it."

Nigel nodded and seemed to come back to himself, his grin returning.

"Okay, so what's next on this date then?"

*

It was getting easier to see Aiden as more than Gabi now. As Aiden.

Shooting the shit like they had over text messages, but now seeing Aiden before him rather than picturing Gabi in his head, it was… It felt good. It felt easy.

It had felt even better when they'd ended up flirting and slinging innuendos just as they had in the past. They - the two of them. Him and Aiden. Not him and Gabi. It was weird, she was kind of blurring into Aiden in some of his memories. He was really starting to understand how Aiden really was Gabi's true form. She had always been Aiden, the exterior had just needed a little work.

It had all felt fucking fantastic right up until they kissed.

And it was such a fucking good kiss. Just a soft and sweet thing, but with so much promise. When Aiden had tried to deepen it, Nigel had freaked. Not because he didn't want it, but because he did.

He wanted it so fucking much his cock had started to ache and it had taken every little bit of his self control not to slip his tongue into Aiden's mouth and pull the guy into his lap whilst he hardened beneath him.

It was at that point, his totally fucking hetero brain had freaked out.

He shouldn't be wanting this, but fuck he was. He was wanting this so bad and it was making his brain short circuit.

Since their reunion in person, a war had begun within Nigel. One on three fronts, and for the most part his heart, his head and his fucking dick were at odds over this. For the minute that he was kissing Aiden, they were in harmony. Until the prospect of tongue. At which his cock and heart both wanted to go hell for leather and his brain did the cerebral equivalent of recoiling at the sight of them.

Nigel decided to ignore that. He was just going to see where the rest of the evening took him and how he reacted to each thing as it arose. What happens, happens, as Aiden said.

And he wasn't sure that was going to be much of anything after the abortive kiss, until he saw Aiden on the dancefloor.

*

Aiden hadn't wanted to push things, but he also had wanted to give Nigel an idea of what he was getting into.

And he had to admit that part of him hoped that, on seeing what Aiden's life was like, the people he associated with and their interests, would make or break with Nigel. Coming to a gay bar and on Leather Daddy night and hanging out with a bunch of large, hairy, though mostly effeminate in Aiden's experience, gay men, was either going to be okay with him or it wasn't.

Whilst Nigel looked even more intimidated than when he'd picked him up from the bar a few hours earlier, he didn't look like he was about to cut and run.

In fact, after they'd managed to get drinks and find a spot to stand between the bar and the dancefloor, Nigel seemed to relax quite a bit. Aiden felt like everything was going to be okay when Nigel leaned in to say to him, "Are you feeling as overdressed as I am?"

Aiden barked a laugh. At least half of the guys were shirtless or wearing some sort of leather tank top or harness. Some were wearing leather booty shorts.

He felt Nigel chuckling next to him and realised how close they were standing. It felt so good.

Nigel still looked a little uncomfortable, but Aiden could understand that - it could be weird to be around half naked people grinding on each other on the dance floor - regardless of gender.

Even so, he was a trooper. They stood and talked, leaning in close to be heard without having to shout. Nigel asked about the couple at the bar, and Aiden realised he was looking over at Santa and Bella, a seemingly straight couple running the gay bar. Aiden explained that Bella ran the local trans group, but it wasn't his place to comment further than that. Which either Nigel understood, or at least respected, because he nodded and changed the subject.

An hour later, the music was pumping and seemed to be getting louder. It was late and Aiden was pretty impressed Nigel had done so well, but figured he should maybe let him off the hook soon.

"I just need to pee, then we'll go, yeah?" Aiden leaned in and told Nigel.

Nigel nodded, an expression of acquiesce, real or feigned.

Thankfully the queue wasn't long and no one was holding up the cubicles by fucking in them, which did happen on occasion. So Aiden was able to head back, refreshed and eager to leave with Nigel and perhaps get at least a goodnight kiss.

He was almost back to Nigel, skirting around the dancefloor when he felt big arms come around him and haul him into the crowd.

"Woah," Aiden let out a surprised cry, but wasn't overly concerned. The hold was gentle and would take nothing to wriggle out of. Looking over his shoulder he recognised one of the regulars he talked to often.

He set Aiden down on the dance floor with a grin and began to bop in front of him, "Dance with me Aiden, show me your moves!"

Aiden couldn't help but shake his head and laugh, "You need to stop drinking! I'm telling Santa to cut you off!" Aiden shouted back over the din.

"Come on, one spin!" The man insisted jovially, taking Aiden's hand and twirling him until Aiden was in fits of giggles.

He was dizzy when he thudded into a hard body, grabbing ahold in order to stay upright and expecting to see his impromptu dance partner, but there was Nigel.

His eyes were burning with the fiery jealousy that he knew of old. It had always equal parts annoyed him and turned him on. Aiden swallowed and felt his dick give a little throb of want, and a growing dampness between his legs.

He wasn't sure whether Nigel would haul him out of there, or maybe even turn on Aiden's over familiar friend, either way, he really hoped that it didn't end badly for anyone.

Aiden was shocked and pleasantly surprised when Nigel pulled Aiden's arms up around his neck and snaked his own around Aiden's waist. They started to move, Nigel's features softening but full of want and need as they started to undulate to the aggressive beat of the music. Just like when they used to go clubbing when they first met, in the club Nigel had part owned a million years ago.

Aiden threw himself into it, taking the chance. Doing as he had back then and grinding against Nigel as he moved, holding him as close as he possibly could.

Nigel didn't fight any of it, pressing back against him and studying Aiden's face intently, as if trying to work out the fucking meaning to life.

They moved swayed with their crotches connected, Aiden's hands drawing back to play with the hair at the back of Nigel's neck. They might as well have rewound a decade.

But they hadn't, he was still Aiden and Nigel didn't seem to mind that. Didn't seem to mind at all as he suddenly pulled Aiden tight to him and claimed his mouth. Aiden groaned, practically trying to fuse himself to the man as their tongues met and they devoured each other on the dance floor.

He was sure he heard Bella call out with a laugh, "Get a room!"

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

There is progress, they will get there... Eventually.

Chapter Notes

CW: the end of this chapter has reference to "gay panic" in that Nigel is having a few issues with acceptance. I mention this as I know it can be something people are uncomfortable reading. The mention in this chapter is brief and is touched on more in the next with a happy resolution.

Oh god, Aiden felt so good in his arms.

Nigel was practically dizzy with the resolving sexual tension that he'd been trying to ignore.

His hands moved of their own accord, sliding from Aiden's waist so that one snaked a little lower, grabbing his ass just firmly enough to pull them tight to each other. The other went up into his hair, enjoying the soft curls against his fingers whilst not allowing any retreat from the increasingly passionate kiss.

It was when Aiden ground against his rapidly hardening cock that Nigel pulled back.

"We should get out of here before this gets obscene," He muttered next to Aiden's ear and felt the man nod against him.

Nigel grabbed his hand, wanting to keep him close but unable to do more than that as they made their way through the busy bar to the door.

He sensed Aiden's hesitation the moment he had pulled away, and wondered if he was worried that Nigel was experiencing some sort of crisis over this.

He fucking wasn't. He wasn't sure why he wasn't, he was even less sure of where they went from here, what would happen beyond kissing, but he was happy to find out.

To make this point he kissed Aiden again. They had just made it out onto the street and the door banged shut behind them, Nigel pulled Aiden back to him, swinging him around until Aiden's back was against the wall.

"I want you," Nigel growled against Aiden's lips before taking them again.

Aiden whimpered into his mouth, responding eagerly to the kiss, even as he began to push his hands to Nigel's shoulders to try and break them apart.

"Wait," Aiden was barely able to get the word out between kisses, but once Nigel realised, he moved back a little, creating some space between them as they both tried to catch their breath.

Aiden looked down, clearly reluctant to meet Nigel's eyes.

"I… hoped, but I really wasn't expecting you to want this," Aiden mumbled.

"I'm trying not to overthink this gorgeous, do you want to try and do the same?" Nigel chuckled, leaning in to nip at Aiden's neck, nuzzling into him.

There was a fucking amazing scent there, something masculine and very Aiden. And his neck was lightly stubbled further up. Nigel groaned, he'd had no idea how much he was going to fucking like that. Was it the manliness? Was it the novelty of something new and, to his mind, maybe a little kinky? Or was it just because it was Aiden?

Nigel wasn't sure but he knew he wanted more. He'd never wanted a man before, but everything about the situation was telling him he did now.

It took him a moment to realise that Aiden had gone rigid in his arms.

Nigel pulled back, Aiden was still looking down.

"What is it gorgeous? What's wrong? Did I do something…"

Aiden shook his head, "No, I… I'm nervous. I'm…"

Nigel wanted to pull him close but also didn't want to spook him further and right now it was like he had hold of a timid rabbit, gone was the feisty person he'd known. The only experience he had to relate to this was the summer where a few of Gabi's old college friends got married and she seemed to be going to a different wedding every weekend. And each one was lead up to by concern over being able to fit into a bridesmaid dress measured months earlier. It had been fine each time, and never quite as bad as this, but it sparked something in Nigel's brain. Like a light bulb turning on over his head.

Aiden was feeling self conscious.

Nigel ran his hands down Aiden's arms and then interlinked their fingers when he got to the bottom, pulling one hand up to gently kiss.

"We will go as slow as you need," Nigel said gently, wanting Aiden to meet his eyes but not wanting to force the issue.

"Can we call it a night?" Aiden said so quietly that Nigel wasn't sure he'd heard it right initially, "I… I'm not ready, I'm sorry."

“Darling, don’t be sorry. It’s my fault. I jumped in with both feet when I saw that guy grinding with you. I… didn’t want you dancing with anyone but me and I let it get out of hand,”

Aiden just nodded mutely, at least raising his chin a little this time and meeting Nigel’s eye for a second.

“You want me to take you home?”

“No,” Aiden replied abruptly, “I’ll get a cab.” Aiden pulled from Nigel and started to walk away, clearly not intending Nigel to follow. He turned back for a moment, “I… I know this looks… I had a great time. I had an amazing time, Nigel. Thank you.”

With that he was gone.

*

Aiden woke with sore eyes. He’d cried himself to sleep and woken feeling puffy and gross. Made all the worse by the knowledge that he could have possibly woken instead next to Nigel’s firm and familiar body.

They could have spent a lazy Sunday morning in bed together in a hazy, post coital glow. Instead he’d run away, like an idiot.

Even as he thought it, he curled in on himself and knew that as much as he’d wanted it, he just wasn’t ready. As much as he’d hoped, he just hadn’t expected Nigel to be interested, or maybe that it would take more to get him comfortable. He had tried to figure if the alcohol could account for Nigel’s easiness with it all, but looking back he’d only had the one pint of beer over dinner, and he wasn’t sure Nigel had even finished that. So his interest was genuine?

And now Aiden was on the back foot.

He’d been so concerned about how Nigel would handle any intimacy, that he didn’t consider how hard it would be for himself.

He didn’t know what Nigel was expecting, but he didn’t have Gabi’s body, not any more. And whilst he loved his body, now he was finally comfortable in it, he felt conscious of it more now than ever. Sure, he’d had a few moments with hookups where he was a little self conscious - who wasn’t? There were still little bits that didn’t sit quite right with him, but that he could disguise well enough and live with.

With Nigel it was something else, something beyond that. Because he was terrified of being judged and compared, of being found wanting. He was the only person that might ever seen him naked that knew what he had looked like before. And that unsettled Aiden more than he had realised it would.

He squeezed his eyes shut again and hugged in on himself, feeling a wave of dysphoria rise in him.

Aiden didn't realise he'd fallen asleep again until the sun was creating a warm glow in his bedroom, even with the curtains almost completely shut. He reached over and turned the radio on, hoping for something peppy to come on, to get him up and into the shower.

Instead Barry Manilow came on and Aiden groaned, burying his face in his pillow and not finding the music the least bit motivational. He was wondering if he should just try to sleep away the whole day and then go to work the next day and try to keep busy enough not to think about the perfect and awful date the night before.

He might have done so, but his phone buzzed somewhere in the bed, and after a minute of scrabbling around he held it in his hand.

Two messages. The most recent had just arrived and was from Bella.

~Hello sweet thing, I hope you boys had fun last night. I knew getting a beefcake to dance with you would get that man of yours to step up. He was making moon eyes at you all night. Hope that gentle push lead to something good x

Aiden sighed out a groan. In that moment both loving and hating Bella to the utmost.

He moved on from the message, trying to push away the looming thoughts of how much he'd fucked up the night before. How fucked up he was even now he had the body he was meant to be in.

But there was no avoiding it, because the older message was from Nigel, the night before, maybe an hour after they parted -

~I had a great time with you tonight. Sorry if I was a bit too forward, I hope that won't put you off another date x

Aiden swallowed and felt the phone slip a little as his hands began to sweat. He felt like he was getting ever more nervous when it came to Nigel.

He tapped out a reply -

~I'm sorry I ducked out, it was rude. I just wasn't feeling great, but I'd love to have another date with you.

He was sorry, and in many way he really hadn't been feeling great, but saying he wanted another date felt like a lie. Part of him wanted to see Nigel every day, and a large part of him never wanted to see him again. Didn't want to make things even worse by being weird and standoffish when he'd lead Nigel to believe he wanted him.

And he did want him, so bad. It all coalesced into the simple truth - Nigel wouldn't want him. Not once they became intimate. He would either be too male for Nigel, too Aiden, not Gabi enough.

Aiden's bottom lip began to tremble and he jumped when the phone went off in his hand.

Nigel was calling.

He hesitated for a minute before swiping to pick up.

“Morning, gorgeous. I… wanted to hear your voice,” There was a lightness in Nigel’s tone that seeped into Aiden as he sank back into his over plumped pillows.

The Ronettes came on the radio and Aiden reached over to turn off ‘Be My Baby’ before he cleared his throat.

“Um, yeah… sorry I…”

“What are you apologising for, darling? There’s no need,” Nigel reprimanded gently.

Aiden frowned, “If… If I… You might have been here next to me.” He pushed out the words before he had a chance to second guess it. They had to be honest, right? It was the only way any of this was going to work.

Nigel was quiet for a moment before he replied, “Aiden, please don’t be sorry for that. I… I’ll wait until you’re ready. Not a minute before,” Nigel’s tone was a little heavier but then he broke into a chuckle, “Not that I wouldn’t have enjoyed seeing you this morning. I bet you look a mess, I think I mussed up your hair a bit when we were dancing.”

Aiden’s chest constricted and then released, bringing a light laugh with it. “I haven’t even looked yet, now I’m dreading it, thanks. I’m still in bed.”

“Lazy Sunday,” Nigel confirmed and Aiden closed his eyes, knowing Nigel was nodding and imagining it in detail. Maybe he was sat in bed too.

“Are… Are you still in bed?” Aiden’s mouth went dry and his heart picked up a beat. Would this be a resolution? From a distance Nigel could imagine anything in his hands and mouth and…

“I had a shower, put on the laundry, but now I’m just sat on the sofa. Nothing but crap on the TV,” Nigel grumbled good naturedly.

Aiden licked his lips and swallowed, “What are you wearing?”

There was a long moment of silence, long enough the Aiden almost hung up. Almost ran.

But then Nigel rumbled fondly, “What is this darling?”

“I… don’t know. Nothing? Just… I… I would like to have seen you this morning too. I’m not ready for… But…” He grasped for the words, hearing the rising note of panic in his own voice. Nigel must have heard it too because he interrupted -

“Sweatpants and a t-shirt,” The words came out hastily, followed by a chuckle and, “Not very sexy.”

Aiden smiled, huffing out a low laugh.

“What are you wearing gorgeous?” Nigel sounded like he was stretching out on his sofa as he spoke, and Aiden could imagine it. He’d sketched Nigel so many times when they were together, it was all too easy to imagine him now that image and been refreshed by seeing him in person.

“Just underwear… I’m still in bed,” Aiden reminded him.

They were both quiet for a moment, each waiting for the other to make the first move, and Aiden realised it had to be him.

“I liked kissing you last night… I liked… You were hard, it felt nice,” Aiden said breathily, squirming a little as his cock immediately began to swell a little with arousal.

“I liked kissing you too darling, I’m getting hard again now just thinking about it,” Nigel growled.

Aiden wanted to whimper, feeling out of his comfort zone a little. But he forced himself to continue.

“Do you want to touch yourself,” It was more request than question.

“I am gorgeous, it’s so hard and dripping with precome, remembering your tongue against mine.”

“Wish I… I could run my tongue over your cock,” Aiden said shakily as he spread his legs and slipped his hand into his underwear. He was already wet and it felt so good spreading that moisture up to his hard little cock, starting to pump it slowly.

“Fuck, I’d love that. Want to bury my hands in your hair as you suck me off. Wanna feel your mouth on me… Unngg…”

Nigel’s words trailed into a grunt and it sent a spike of arousal through Aiden. For so long he’d thought he’d never hear Nigel make noises like that again.

His heart was pounding as he stroked himself faster and faster, moving his fingers down so that his cock was between the groove of his fingers but the tips were pressing ever so slightly into his entrance.

“I want to feel you come in my mouth, want to taste you…” Aiden managed between breaths.

“Ngg, fuck… Gorgeous…”

Aiden could hear the fleshy sounds of Nigel working himself, hard and fast.

“Want you to come… nnguunggg, darling, let me make you come,” Nigel begged as every noise at his end of the line became more urgent. “What do you want to…”

“Fuck… Nigel, want your fingers inside me, want you to suck my cock-”

“UUGhhhh nnnng, oh fuuuucck…” Nigel lost cohesion.

Aiden fucked against his hand harder and faster, sobbing a little cry as he came too.

There was nothing but panting at either end of the line for minutes on end, before Nigel finally cleared his throat.

“I uh, I should get cleaned up,” Nigel said, his tone flat and lacking any emotion.

Aiden stiffened at the change, his own words evaporating.

“I’ll text you later, okay? Um, make a date,” Nigel’s words sounded forced and Aiden felt a pain in his chest.

“Sure,” Was all he could respond before they rang off.

So this was it then? Nigel had hit gay panic after all.

Aiden wasn’t disappointed, reminding himself he knew this was coming. It didn’t stop him feeling any less rejected.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Not quite gay panic, Nigel's concerns run deeper than that...

Until six days earlier Nigel had had no idea that it was possible to come and freak out simultaneously.

He'd been so into it when he'd been talking dirty to Aiden, fisting his cock whilst he imagined what it would be like to let the boy suck him off. He could imagine the familiarity he would have with his cock, made sweeter by the years spent going without that mouth on him. But he was beyond even attempting to deny that he wanted to specifically feel Aiden on his cock. He wanted that masculine hand wrapped around him as Aiden tongued at his cockhead. He wanted to look down at those big, doe eyes as Aiden took him to the back of his throat.

Maybe he wouldn't feel that desire for any other man, but he wasn't going to insult either of them by pretending that Aiden didn't turn him on.

If Aiden had let them leave together after the date, Nigel was sure they would have slept together. And that thought hadn't put him off in the least. When he'd seen that leather-clad, sweaty guy dancing with Aiden - *his* Aiden - it had shaken him into an inevitable action.

Maybe it was better they hadn't gone home together, because Nigel, in the heat of the moment, had thought he was ready. He clearly wasn't.

The moment Aiden had mentioned his own cock, Nigel had blown his load and lost his mind.

Whilst having Aiden tell him he wanted Nigel to suck his cock, was so hot he had been unable to deny his impending climax, it was also a mindfuck on several levels. Something he should have thought about earlier but hadn't. One of those things he'd kept inwardly debating. His brain wanting to pull him into this inevitable conversations with himself, but instead he chose to ignore it. Not wanting to deal with that until he had to deal with it.

Which was now, he guessed. And he wished he'd really tried to resolve it earlier, rather than when Aiden was on the other end of the phone, enjoying a vulnerable and intimate moment with him. It had been all Nigel could do to give polite conversation whilst his mind shifted into meltdown.

And he felt like a prize asshole over that. He knew Aiden had to have sensed what had happened, and he wouldn't deny it if asked. In part, he'd fucking freaked out over having phone sex with a man - despite wanting it. Despite enjoying it.

Nigel scrubbed a hand roughly over his face and let out a small cry of frustration. The more time he spent with Aiden the more time he *wanted* to spend with him. And there was attraction. Attraction he wanted to act on… right up until the point that he didn't. Was it just a comfort level? He wasn't sure. Fuck, all of this was way passed his comfort zone by several wide miles.

His mind was trying to process so fucking much, he was surprised he hadn't had a fucking stroke or something. When he thought he'd been messaging Gabi, he'd thought about them getting back together, it had been difficult not to. He'd imagined it just going back to how it had been - which was such bullshit. That wasn't them and so they had to find a new way together if this was going to work.

And he wanted it to work, with Aiden. But it made everything so much harder. The combination of it being something so completely alien to him, coupled with the pressure for it to be good for them both was turning his mind in circles. It hadn't just been the bizarre reality of him getting off with a man that had hit him, a large part of him was freaking out over exactly *how* he'd get Aiden off.

And that was the worst rub of it. Gabi had hated him going down on her. Sometimes if they were really getting each other going she might allow it, he never did anything she wasn't cool with. But even if he made her come like that, it was clear she wasn't really into it and he could probably count on both hands how many times he'd done it whilst they were together.

So would Aiden really want him to suck his cock when there had been such an issue before? Or maybe that was the issue? Maybe now that Aiden had a cock he was totally cool with it and that had been why Gabi hated it? It was such a mindfuck.

It didn't help that had no idea what to expect. What junk did trans men have? He had no fucking idea and it was stupidly fucking late for it to be dawning on him that he should probably have looked into it before their first date. Even if he hadn't expected something to happen then, or even known if he wanted it to, it would have given him vital information for future possibilities.

It wasn't that he had a preference over Aiden's junk specifically - that was not something he should comment on, he understood that much. Just as much as he understood he probably shouldn't outright ask Aiden what the situation was with that, right? That felt intrusive and something that Aiden would fucking hate. But Nigel had no idea what the options were to begin with.

He knew it really shouldn't matter, and it didn't. If he wanted Aiden then he wanted whatever was in his pants or else he might as well call it quits now. He just had been so fucking thrown by Aiden mentioning his cock that he just needed to better understand what the fuck that meant.

Nigel banged around his kitchen, finding things to make for a late dinner after a long day. Other than some bullshit in the morning - issues locating Randall who'd gone walkabout again - it had been a calm day. That had just given him way too much time to get into his head about all of this.

He ended up throwing some pasta into a pot and pulling mushrooms out of the fridge to try and make something remotely tasty.

He was chopping the third mushroom when he sliced his finger. It wasn't deep, but it was bleeding like a fucker. If he didn't get his fucking head on straight, he'd end up maiming himself.

Nigel chuckled to himself at the thought of getting his head on straight. It was sort of barbed and unsure chuckle, despite the underlying humour.

He was straight. He knew he was straight and had never had cause to believe anything else.

Until now.

And a realisation that he didn't give a single fuck what was between Aiden's legs, but not knowing for sure was terrifying him. Would he ever be able to please Aiden? Would he be up for all the things Aiden might want to do? He was pretty sure he wasn't interested in taking it up his ass. Which also seemed so fucking hypocritical in that moment, because he'd never considered that a woman might not want to. He and Gabi had done it a few times. It felt fucking nice but it hadn't become a regular part of their sex life. To not consider reciprocating, it dawned on him, was some macho bullshit that was probably both misogynistic and homophobic on some level. Not that that would have ever occurred to him before now.

Nigel put down the knife and took the half cooked pasta off the heat going to his bedroom and grabbing his laptop.

He paused in front of google for a moment, unsure what the fuck to even search for before typing 'transgender male', and going from there.

*

"Okay sweetheart, what's going on? You left here the other night with a guy who could barely keep his hands off you, and now you look miserable," Bella's tone was warm and caring as she set the coffees in front of them.

They sat at the bar though it wasn't open yet, Aiden wrapped his hands around the coffee as though to warm them, but really for some comfort.

It was Saturday morning and the week *had* been miserable. After the high and subsequent crash of Saturday night, the following high and crash of Sunday morning, things had been strained.

Nigel hadn't initiated contact all week and the couple of times Aiden had text him the replies had been brief, perfunctory and with an apology of being swamped at work. Which Aiden had had from Nigel before, so perhaps it meant nothing? But he knew it did. There was

something measured and forced in every word from Nigel, the previous ease between them gone

“He freaked out,” Aiden blew out the words on a sigh before sipping at his coffee with absolute focus.

Bella gave a knowing nod and smile, huffing a light laugh, “Yeah, that’ll happen. Have you talked since?”

Aiden shook his head, “Not really. A few stilted messages. We were meant to be having another date, but it seems to all be quiet on that front now.”

“Well baby, he’ll either come around or he won’t, you just need to take care of yourself in it all,” Bella’s words were both firm and gentle.

Aiden nodded, letting out another deep sigh.

Bella slipped her arm around his shoulders and gave him a little squeeze.

“Thanks Bella, I really appreciate it. You and Santa have been so great to me over all of this,” Aiden spoke from the heart and Bella hushed him.

“That’s what family is for, baby. We gotta take care of our own. The lord knows there are plenty of people out there waiting to do us harm,” She stopped and looked thoughtful. “I think he genuinely cares for you. You now, not just from the past. And… He just might need some time to adjust it in his brain. And maybe he won’t be able to in the end, but I think he wants to try and that means a lot. Be patient with him. I know it hurts,” Bella squeezed him again, “but I think you think he’s worth it. Hopefully he’ll think you’re worth it too.”

Aiden smiled. It was a weak, lopsided thing, but the most genuine smile on his face all week.

After he left the bar he was lost in his thoughts. Maybe he had expected too much of Nigel, or put too much pressure on? What with the gayest of gay nights out. He hated that he was second guessing this. Yeah, that all probably contributed to Nigel’s freak out but he was still sure that it had been right to be up front, even if over the top, so they knew where they stood.

Aiden resisted the urge to make the salty assumption that this was definitely over now. As Bella said, he had to be patient. He owed Nigel that at least, he was clearly making the effort to get passed all this. Or at least he had been, what he was up to know with the radio silence was anyone’s guess.

When Aiden got home he sat down with his phone, writing a quick text before setting it aside and hoping to ignore it thereafter. An impossible task.

*

~Hope you’re having a good week. Drinks again soon?

The casual vibe of the text made Nigel ache. Not because he thought for one minute that Aiden was being dismissively casual, but because he knew absolutely that he wasn’t.

He'd always been that way, one to play things down on occasion.

Nigel swallowed and felt the blood drain from his face a little. Conflicting emotions surging and frying his brain, as seemed to happen a lot these days. He had to give it a minute to adjust and rewire.

Nigel had started to think of his brain as a computer. He knew little about computer technology or the inner workings of the human brain, but this is what he understood - his brain was given new information and had to rewrite over the top of the old, and sometimes that threw up errors which he had to deal with.

So that's what he did.

The cause of this new, and momentary blip, was the knowledge that not only was Aiden reaching out whilst trying to seem casual, which made him feel like the utter shit he was for not being in touch much and giving short responses when he was.

And the fact that he just thought about Aiden - about past Aiden, the person he had known back then, the person he had married, as Aiden. Not as Gabi. He had overwritten her and that… was just fine.

Somewhere along the line the distinction had dissolved without his noticing.

Nigel's work phone rang, startling him out of his thoughts. He pushed his mobile phone to the end of the desk and picked his work phone, expecting it to be one of his charges or perhaps one of the hostels or other service providers involved with the programme. He was hoping it would be Randall because that kid seemed to keep disappearing these days and something was definitely up, but instead -

"Nigel Ibanescu speaking."

"Nigel, hi. You probably don't know me. My name is Bella, I'm a friend of Aiden's, from the bar."

"Oh, um… Yeah, hi…" Nigel frowned, wondering what on earth the woman had to call him over, let alone where she got the number. But that was quickly replaced with anxious concern, because why else would she call?

"Is it Aiden, is he okay?" His mind was reeling. Hadn't Aiden just sent the text?

"Oh, sorry. No, he's fine. I didn't mean to worry you. I just… wanted to talk about him. He's a very special young man. My husband and I are very fond of him and we can't ignore an opportunity to help where we can. And I think we can help with you. Or, help you rather," She let out a light laugh that eased Nigel.

"He asked you to call me?" Nigel frowned.

"Oh god no, not at all. He mentioned before where you worked and I tracked you down through the website. I was just going to leave a message as I didn't expect you to be working today, but I'm glad I caught you nonetheless,"

“We work weekends on a rota. Addicts aren’t 9 to 5,” He tried to sound jovial, but it came out a little flat - his mind trying to anticipate a few steps ahead on where she was going with this.

“Of course, is this a good time? I just wanted to ask if you’d consider coming over to the bar sometime to chat with my husband. He, uh… He’s been in your position. You might find it helpful. Only if you are amenable of course?”

“Yeah, sure,” Nigel answered a little too quickly in his eagerness. In the past he might have been too proud to take advice on his other half. He wasn’t up for that sort of bullshit now, he’d take all the help he could get when it came to Aiden. And Bella was right, maybe that help coming from people who cared about Aiden and his well being, would be a smart move.

“Great. Well, are you free tomorrow, any time. We can get the bar covered for Santa.”

“Yes, I will be free before work, eight a.m.”

“I’ll let Santa know to expect you, It was nice talking with you Nigel,”

A couple more pleasantries and then they rang off.

Nigel felt a little bit more hopeful.

All week he’d had these butterflies trapped in his chest. He wanted to see Aiden again, but after the way things had suddenly cooled - his fault - he had no idea how to go about fixing it. Before he did anything he needed a better understanding of transgender people.

He had spent hours researching various things, one search leading into another - people’s experiences, dysphoria, surgeries, hormone therapy. He had gained a greater understanding around the subject. Things that hopefully gave him more background where Aiden was concerned, without having ask him directly and seem like he was prying.

Not that he wasn’t curious about Aiden’s personal situation but he just didn’t feel right asking and so far Aiden had only offered as much as he was clearly comfortable with, and Nigel wouldn’t ask for more.

He just wished he could have been there for him over the years. A shoulder to cry on, someone to hold him. Just thinking about the kind of shit Aiden might have gone through all alone over the years made his stomach twist.

It left him aching with a need to hold Aiden and never let him go.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Good advice and awkward questions...

For a day Aiden found himself checking his phone almost constantly. In the end he threw himself into his latest project, an ad campaign for a charity, but even trying to work with images that didn't contrast too harshly with the charity's garrish logo was an ordeal.

He found his mind wandering to years ago, sitting around sketching or painting. He used to travel, go to interesting places, abandoned churches and ancient ruins and just sketch. Aiden tried not to think about the pile of graphic novels he'd once created, gathering dust on his shelves.

Before everything had started to go wrong he had submitted a couple to an interested publisher. They had loved them but by the time they were published he had left Nigel and started to transition. Life had become overwhelming in a way he'd never known was possible before. If he thought things before transitioning had been bad, they were a cake walk.

Yes, as hormone therapy and surgeries had progressed he had felt better in himself, but life wasn't perfect. He was comfortable in his body for the first time in his life. But his mental health plummeted, his anxiety rose. Those couple of years when he didn't pass as male but was clearly not female. The stares, the overheard comments. It's one of the most personal and private things a person can go through and have no choice but to do so publicly, and have to deal with public opinion on that. It was harrowing and took strength he didn't know he had to get through it.

So he had dropped the ball. A deadline was given for the next graphic novel and he missed it. Missed a lot of things. Lots of things passed him by, including friendships.

As time went on he just felt lucky to have kept Viv's friendship, made a few new friends, and wasn't a complete recluse. He got to the point where he just counted himself lucky to have a job related to art in any way. He could have easily ended up in a worse situation, and pursuing more than that felt impossible.

It hurt to think about it. And whilst he didn't hate his job, it wasn't what he wanted to be doing for the rest of his life.

Aiden pulled himself back from the melancholia and checked his phone again. It had only been a few hours, but given that Nigel usually replied pretty quickly, it had him out of sorts. The whole thing did. Nigel's reaction and now this… Maybe there really was no way to make this work?

By the late evening Aiden called it a day, saving his files to his work drive before logging off his computer and heading to bed. He curled in a ball and tried not to let his thoughts runaway with themselves. Easier said than done.

*

Nigel had never been at a bar this early before, at least not from this end of the day.

Santa - Jack - had opened the door and let him in a little after 8am. It was odd to be in a bar outside of opening hours. It was quiet and a little chilly.

After a warm welcome Santa went behind the bar and made them coffees before joining Nigel in a comfortable booth.

“This place looks different during the day,” Nigel commented, nodding his thanks as he took the coffee.

All the way over he'd been doing mental backflips. He wanted to be with Aiden, in every sense. But in the next moment the idea terrified him. He wasn't gay, so how would that work? And what would people say? Nigel wasn't one to usually give much of a fuck over other people's opinions, but this was big! This was different, right? His mind had flipped back with a reprimand, surely he'd only care about people thinking he was gay if he thought there was something wrong with being gay.

After the noise of his thoughts, it was a relief to be in the quiet bar.

“So, Nigel. You and Aiden… Look, I don't want you to think this is some sort of warning off. But Bella cares about that kid, so do I. We don't want him hurt and… I don't think you want to hurt him. So… You need advice? Ask me. We've been where you are, maybe we can help you through this.” The man gave an encouraging smile and Nigel nodded at both the words and in thanks, taking a minute to work out what he wanted to say.

Years ago he wouldn’t have accepted help like this, too proud and toxic, but he’d come a long way since then. He’d had to learn to ask for, and accept help when he was recovering and instilled the same in others. To be honest it still riled him, usually, even if he buried it. But this didn't. Because if there was any way anyone could help him navigate this, he’d take it.

“Can… Can I ask, what happened with you two?” Nigel asked quietly, knowing it might be too personal and Santa might want to keep this more general, talk through what’s happening with him and Aiden and advice from that standpoint.

“You can ask,” Jack’s reply was dry and good humoured, even so for a moment Nigel thought he wouldn’t answer, pretty sure either way he’d overstepped. But then Jack took a sip of his coffee and looked thoughtfullyat Nigel.

“I knew from a young age I was gay. I wasn’t like the other kids in my neighbourhood or at my school. I didn’t have that interest in girls, but I did get a boner in the locker room when I was thirteen and that I guess was the real moment of realisation for me. It’s hard to be yourself when society constantly tells you what ‘normal’ is and that you must fit that mould.

And let me tell you, being black and gay isn't a picnic, so I wasn't particularly happy about the whole thing," Jack chuckled and was smiling as he spoke. Though there was clearly some rough shit behind those words, the man wasn't going to let it get him down and Nigel appreciated that.

Jack took a long gulp of his coffee, wiped the foam from his near white whiskers and continued.

"I was in my thirties before I really made peace with myself, and then I met Bella. She wasn't Bella back then. She was the love of my life from the moment we first spoke, I knew no matter what that this was the person I was going to be with forever. We were together five years, bought this bar together, had a happy life, and then she told me. She'd always had this little sadness to her and, well, she'd worked it out. She explained it all to me and I could see everything she was saying - and I had to agree. She was a woman. As much as I had loved the person I met, and the body he had, I knew Bella was a woman and I wasn't about to stand in the way of her being who she was. I wasn't about to lose her either." His eyes were set to the middle distance and he looked for a moment like he was going to take another drink, but instead he continued.

"Nigel, I'll give it to you straight, as they say," a grin there, "I was as supportive as a partner could be, but on the inside I was dying. I felt like I was losing the love of my life, because I am gay and they're female. Those things don't add up. And that fucked with my head more than a little. I took some time out, went away for a couple of months to clear my head, tried to make sense of the whole thing. Not Bella, she made total damn sense, but the fact that I still loved her." He stopped and shook his head, this time he did drink some coffee, sipping slowly and lost in thought.

"Yeah, I…" Nigel started, not sure he could find the words to say how much he understood that. In the end, he found the truth falling from him with no thought, "I love Aiden. I… I think I'm in love with him. And some of that love is from before, but some of it…" Nigel shook his head and shrugged at the same time.

"Oh, I hear you man," Jack agreed with a slow nod, "With Bella, I decided to stay and see what happened. We were both honest, both on the same page. And for me that was that. I thought maybe at some point, once she was a ways along with her medical transition, it would cross a line for me. Doesn't matter how much you love someone, if you don't want them physically but they want a fulfilling sex life then it's kinda fucking selfish to keep them trapped in that situation. So, I was prepared to walk and we both knew it. And then I didn't. Time went on, her body changed, and I… well maybe I'm not as gay as I thought?" Jack chuckled. "Maybe sexuality really is that fluid. Maybe it's just because it's her, maybe I'm just straight for Bella. Maybe you're just gay for Aiden." He shrugged.

Nigel clenched his jaw. Yeah, maybe he wasn't as straight as he thought, and wasn't that a fucking mind fuck?

Jack must have caught it in his expression because he cleared his throat and continued in a more determined tone, pinning Nigel with his hard gaze.

“The fact is, as much as I joke about it, I found out something about myself through this. About society. That we are constantly told everything is a binary, good and evil, male and female, gay or straight. We constantly see our bi and pan siblings being dismissed as confused, undecided or greedy. Trans people are told they need to fit into a box - they have to be the most feminine of women or the most butch men to be valid, more than cis people ever have to be. And being with Bella, it taught me that that is all a massive steaming pile of horse shit,” Jack’s jaw was set and there was a rage in his eyes. Not anger, but passion.

“So nothing is really a binary. I’m gay, was gay… I’m mostly gay but the person I fell in love with is a woman. And I’m not going to fuck that up, I’m not going to lose all those years of a committed loving relationship, because I need to prove to someone in this fucked up society that sexuality is a binary. Maybe I’m bi? Maybe I always was but just like… Five percent into women and this is what happened? But the fact is, it doesn’t matter. These things are all a spectrum and I’m not going to try and say that I know everything about it. But I know about me, and I know about Bella. And I’ll be damned if I lose the person I love the most in this world just so I can grasp in my dying hands the fact that I am a gay man.”

Nigel realised his jaw hurt from how much he was clenching it, the muscle sore and teeth aching. Jack maybe realised too and he visibly relaxed a little. Nigel tried to relax too, but his throat was sore and his fucking heart ached. For Jack and Bella, for him and Aiden, for all the poor fuckers out there being crammed into boxes of misery.

Jack reached over and put a large hand over Nigel’s giving it an encouraging squeeze before continuing gently, “There’s only one thing you need to ask yourself here Nigel, are you willing to lose Aiden and what you guys might have together, to hold onto your identity as a straight man?”

Nigel blinked, wanting to shake his head. He wanted Aiden and it terrified him for all the reasons Jack had said and more. He knew it wouldn’t be easy but maybe he could let go of this idea of the box he was in and just let this happen?

Jack continued in a soft tone, like he was reading Nigel’s mind, “I’m not saying it will be easy, I’m not saying you’re not going to have a fuck load of gay panic in your future every time you want to hold his hand in public and then wonder how that will look to other people. But is the way society thinks, and the way people might judge you, worth losing him over?”

Jack studied him for a moment and Nigel wondered if he could see how shaken he was. Not just the truth in it all, but the repeated notion of him losing Aiden was even more terrifying than the thought of accepting this gayness in himself. It made him hurt. He didn’t want to lose Aiden. He couldn’t. Not again.

Jack squeezed Nigel’s hand again before releasing it.

“Time to stop thinking about what society thinks, what it wants, and start thinking about what you want. Just think how much better this world would be if everytime someone met that person that is so damn right for them there’s nothing but good ahead, actually gave themselves over to it… They’re the wrong colour or gender, they’re too fat, too thin, I prefer blondes or hate redheads. Can you imagine how amazing and loved up this world would be if

everyone just forgot about the prejudices and preferences and just let themselves be with the personality they loved? I think it would be pretty fucking beautiful."

With that Jack stood and drained the last of his coffee before walking off, perhaps sensing Nigel needed time to digest.

And he did. He had to break it down, being gay or not was one thing. How and what other people thought about that was another. But there was something still niggling. An insecurity, an unfamiliar lack of assuredness. He didn't like feeling that way and it had had him on the back foot with Aiden for a while now, he realised. And it was more than this. Perhaps the chat with Santa helped him sort all these things into their separate categories of things to give or not give a fuck about. And it left one thing remaining.

Nigel was terrified of disappointing Aiden. Of not knowing what to do, not knowing how to please him.

"Fuck… Nigel, want your fingers inside me, want you to suck my cock-"

The words reverberated around his skull, sending a flush of heat and fear up his neck. He felt like a fucking virgin. He found himself once more aroused by the words. By the thought of what Aiden might have meant.

He had to admit to himself that he, no stranger to sexual activity and considering such with someone he'd had the most sex with in his entire life, was out of his fucking depth.

*

Aiden couldn't take the radio silence any more. Sunday had come and gone, now he was in work and Monday was moving slower than any Monday ever had.

He wanted to send something confronting, he was angry and felt abandoned. The thought that Nigel had felt abandoned by him before quelled his ire. So instead of hot headed follow up, Aiden took time on his way home Monday evening to think it over before finally sending, simply -

~Please talk to me.

When he got home, Aiden tried to ignore his phone. He showered and made himself dinner and waited. And waited.

He was almost nodding off reading in bed when a message buzzed on his phone. It took a moment for him to get his bearings and read the message, twice. His heart in his mouth with ever word until the end.

~I'm sorry darling. I should have messaged, it's been a busy few days and I've had a lot of thinking to do. Let me take you to dinner on Friday night? But I have a favour to ask too, if that's ok. Something personal.

Aiden felt almost feverish with nerves. The renewed contact, the pleasant tone and the request of a favour had his palms sweating.

~Ok.

Aiden's heart was hammering and he felt a little sick as he waited. He jumped when his phone rang, expecting another text instead.

"Hello gorgeous," Nigel's warm growl made Aiden smile as he sank back into his pillows. "Work has been kicking my ass, one of my kids isn't checking in when he should be, so I've been on my toes. I should have messaged you."

"Oh. Hi," Aiden replied, hearing the old Nigel in just those few words, as though time had turned back and they were still in love. His heart skipped a beat for a moment and he couldn't help how his breath hitched before he asked, "It's ok. What's the favour?"

"I, um," Nigel sounded nervous, as did the light chuckle he let out, "I feel like a fucking idiot darling. I don't want to overstep anything and… I've researched but I don't… I don't know what you… Your… body… I don't know, how you… What you like..."

"Fuck," Aiden gasped, as realisation dawned of what this could be about. And it hadn't occurred to him, which was ridiculous. How many time had he told people to fuck off, that what was between his legs was only the business of the people he was fucking. "Surgeries, you want to know…" The words came out in a rush and then dried up.

"No, no… I don't want to pry… I just…"

Aiden's face felt hot with the blush rising up his cheeks, and the responding groan of amused humiliation on the end of the line let Aiden know Nigel was also feeling like a stupid teenager.

"Oh god," Aiden groaned, letting out a chuckle and slapping his free hand to his face.

"I just… damn, is this awkward?"

He could practically see Nigel shaking his head and probably blushing too - one of those rare occasions.

"No, it's fine… honestly it is…" Aiden encouraged, a little more serious as the gravity of it all settled. Nigel wanted to understand more about his body for… reasons. Aiden trembled.

"I just don't want it to be a surprise, I mean… shit that came out wrong. I want… when um, I mean, if… If you want to sometime, I want it to feel good for you and-"

"You're worried that you won't live up to our past sex life?" Aiden finished for him, trying to shoulder the embarrassment.

"It's a hell of a fucking sex life to live up to, darling," Nigel chuckled and Aiden almost couldn't believe this was the same man who had gone quiet on him only a few days earlier. And maybe if - when - anything happened between them, Nigel would freak out again. He felt more prepared for that now, and wasn't even sure it would be a deal breaker, unless Nigel said he definitely was done.

Aiden let out a soft sigh, his words quiet though not a whisper, “I haven’t had any surgeries, not… I mean, only my chest. The rest is all me just… um… enhanced…” He winced as he began to explain.

“The testosterone, yeah…” Nigel agreed, thoughtfully.

Aiden blinked, “Um, yeah… it does that,” a wave of discomfort hit out of nowhere and Aiden felt like dysphoria was starting to claw at his edges. He shuddered. “I’m not a woman Nigel, I have… I still have a vagina, but I’m not a woman. You understand that right.”

The words came out harsh and he was half expecting an affronted response, instead there were soothing hushes.

“Shh, darling it’s okay. I know that. I wasn’t… I just wanted to… Like I said, I’d just want you to feel good. I…” A chuckle loosened in Nigel’s chest, “I fucking miss making you come darling and I don’t want to fuck it up if I get the chance again.”

Aiden couldn’t help the smile or hold back his laugh. They laughed softly together for a moment before thoughtful silence set in.

Aiden left it a minute before asking, “So… what’s the favour though?”

“Ah, yeah, this is the part where I’m basically a fucking virgin again gorgeous and you need to help me with some sex-ed. I just… could you send me something? Porn? Photos, videos, I don’t know… stories? Of what you like, what you’d like me to do? I want to… I just want to make sure I’m doing it right… when I suck your cock.”

Aiden drew a breath so sharply that he almost winded himself.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Finally... FINALLY!!

Chapter Notes

CW: This chapter includes reference to trans porn videos at the start.
There is also a little oral sex performed on a trans guy, front hole penetration, and rough sex. This also includes thoughts and discussions of lower and top dysphoria, especially within a sexual/intimate context. If any of this is a problem for you to read, please stop at the - *** - the rest of the chapter is explicit.

When Nigel got to Aiden's door there was no more ignoring it. He'd been sort of thankful that work had been busy - a couple of new kids in the programme and trying to sort out Randall's fucking disappearing acts. It had stopped him having to think about this too much.

Nigel felt so fucking nervous. More nervous than the first time he'd taken Aiden out all those years ago. Maybe because so much more was riding on this? He didn't want to fucking lose Aiden again.

He wasn't fucking going to.

He knocked lightly on the door before running his sweaty palms over his shirt, shuffling the bottle of wine from hand to hand to do so.

Nigel swallowed hard as the door opened.

Aiden looked fucking gorgeous. He was wearing worn jeans and a henley, opened at the top. Nigel couldn't help but let his eyes follow the soft curve of his neck down to his clavicle. He licked his lips before pulling the lower one between his teeth.

"Nigel?" Aiden was frowning when Nigel pulled his eyes up.

"Hello gorgeous," Nigel tried to cover his obvious lusting by leaning forward and kissing Aiden's cheek before walking into the apartment.

And fuck, Aiden smelt good. And the feel of the stubble against his cheek made Nigel's cock twitch. There was no way he could deny that he was attracted to the man, even if he had

fucking panicked about it. He wouldn't have panicked if that attraction wasn't there.

He was at a loss to explain it, given that he'd never been interested in men before. He remembered someone telling him once that physical attraction was relative to emotional attraction. Someone could be the ugliest fucker on the planet, but if you started to fall for their personality it would make them more attractive to you over time. Beauty definitely being in the eye of the fucking beholder. Nigel had mused in the past that it explained a lot - like his cousin Mihai, who looked like a fucking dog but had practically a supermodel for a wife.

Maybe it explained this with Aiden? Because he was so fucking in love with the man he wasn't sure he could find him unattractive even if he looked like Mihai.

And the fucking porn he'd sent!

Nigel continued into the room, setting the bottle of red onto the coffee table, not wanting to turn back and face the man whilst he still felt flushed and on the verge of getting hard, like a fucking teenager. He didn't want to seem like a fucking horndog, even if he was one right now.

He'd been reviewing the videos Aiden had linked him over the last few days. All trans guys, some with other trans guys, some with cis guys. Fuck, Nigel had even found it hot when one trans guy had gone down on a seriously hung cis guy - deepthroating for all he was worth.

Nigel hadn't expected to be repulsed exactly. Maybe feel uncomfortable or out of his depth, and yeah there was this weird moment of awkwardness when he pressed play on the first one. But then he couldn't stop thinking about him and Aiden doing things like this. More than ever, Nigel wanted to suck Aiden's cock. He had no idea what to expect, how big or what it looked like - there had been a variety in the videos. No idea what Aiden liked, but the videos had been a great starting point in technique.

And now his fucking mouth was watering.

"Nigel, what's going on? Are you okay?" There were so many emotions in those words it hurt. Concern, fear, defensiveness. Nigel hated he'd brought that out in Aiden.

He turned and took the two steps back to him, taking Aiden's hands in his own and looking down, feeling his face really reddening now.

"I'm fucking nervous, darling," He chuckled and was glad to feel Aiden relax in his hands.

There was an almost not there sigh, and then, "It's okay. We don't have to… we're going for dinner Nigel, then we go from there. There's no pressure for us to do anything. Not tonight or… you know, when you're comfortable. When we're both in the mood and ready for it."

Aiden's voice was light and comforting and fucking maddening as all Nigel could think was that he was in the fucking mood right now. Had been since the nightclub. That had broken something loose in him, and he couldn't be more grateful that that large and hairy interloper had driven him to action.

“I didn’t make reservations, I didn’t know where you’d… feel most comfortable,” Nigel really did want Aiden to choose given their previous experience, but at the same time didn’t want it to seem like he didn’t want to be seen out with him. He thought that might be a bit difficult, in the unfamiliarity of it, but he’d get over it.

Aiden looked over at the bottle of wine.

“Oh, yeah, wine. I… didn’t want to bring flowers or chocolate,” Nigel admitted awkwardly and then swallowed. Was he trying too hard? Had he got it wrong? “I wasn't sure what to bring a guy… Not that… I mean, anyone can like flowers and chocolate, any man I mean…”

Aiden laughed, and slipped his hands out of Nigel’s to bring them up to cup Nigel’s face.

“I appreciate the thought, and how hard you’re trying. It’s a thoughtful gift.” Aiden’s smile sent Nigel fucking dreamy. He missed how he felt when Aiden praised him. He didn’t get a lot of that shit growing up, so every time Aiden had praised him over the years, even just thanked him for something thoughtful, it melted him.

Aiden’s hands fell to Nigel’s shoulder and then down as Aiden stepped closer and lay his head on Nigel’s chest.

“Can we stay here? I think… I think I just want to spend time with you, without drunks and servers-”

“And leather daddies,” Nigel added with a growl.

Aiden laughed and Nigel enjoyed the feeling of that against him.

“Yeah, those too. We could stream a movie and order pizza? Something meat on it is bound to go great with the wine.”

“I hear that’s how it’s done,” Nigel agreed, “some kind of beef with some kind of red.”

Aiden hummed his agreement but no move to go. They just stood there holding each other.

*

They didn’t sit down to watch the movie until after the pizza. They’d had a small glass of wine each whilst waiting for it, and sat at Aiden’s small dining table. He had resisted the urge to run his socked foot up Nigel’s leg, but only barely.

He didn’t want to push Nigel into anything. He couldn’t handle another gay panic, but it was so hard. It all felt so familiar and good. It was too easy to forget this wasn’t the past, and when the realisation hit that it wasn’t, it hurt. He didn’t want it to be the past, or maybe wished they could have had this as the past - Nigel and Aiden not Nigel and Gabi. But Aiden knew well, thinking that way lead to madness.

After a couple of slices each they were both done. Aiden for one didn’t have much of an appetite.

When they moved to the sofa to put on the movie, he sat and Nigel sat next to him. Not just next to him, up against him - their thighs pressing together.

Aiden swallowed, trying to calm his pulse as he reached for the remote and pulled up the movie. He pressed play and leaned back against the sofa cushions.

“You don’t… you don’t have to…” Aiden bit his lower lip as Nigel moved even closer to him, their entire bodies pressed together, and slid his arm around him.

It was so like how they’d used to snuggle up when they were first together, it tore through Aiden’s heart. He wanted to be hopeful but he didn’t dare. He knew Nigel wanted to try and make this work, but he had to prepare himself for him freaking out again.

Nigel just hummed lightly, settling so that Aiden was in the crook of his arm as they watched. Aiden let out a shaky breath and settled back, strangely warmed if nervous. It was so familiar and comfortable, so easy to relax into. He felt Nigel relax against him too and they watched the movie in companionable silence.

An hour of action and explosions saw them snuggling closer and closer with no intent. And Aiden wasn’t even conscious of it when he let a hand drop to Nigel’s thigh and rub small circles there. An absent minded action of affection that he’d done a million or more times before.

Aiden started to realise that Nigel’s breath was coming in longer draws, almost shaky. He looked side on to him and saw how he ran his tongue out to wet his lips and then swallowed hard.

Aiden turned back to the screen, and without glancing further at each other, Nigel turned slightly. Just enough to move his free hand over to Aiden’s knee. It was there lightly just for a moment, causing Aiden’s breath to catch and his own hand to still. Nigel’s hand moved quickly up his thigh, as though he might lose his nerve, and cupped Aiden’s crotch.

“Nigel…” It came out a breathless whisper, “you don’t… if you don’t want…”

- *** -

Nigel began kneading his packer, feeling the shape of it as he ground it against Aiden’s increasingly hardening cock. Aiden’s breath was coming out heavy, hitching every time Nigel moved. Aiden turned to him then, Nigel was looking down at his hand, his jaw clenching and Aiden couldn’t tell if the discomfort there was because he didn’t find it arousing or because he did.

Aiden was too nervous, too scared of breaking whatever this exploration was, to reach for Nigel, resisting the urge to do so. Nonetheless he moaned at the friction, at the act, and at the sudden memory of the weight of Nigel’s cock in his own hand. He felt tears collect at the corner of his eyes as he let out little whimpers.

Nigel looked up at him then, “You’re beautiful,” his voice was rough and Aiden startled a little when he leaned in to kiss him.

It was a soft press at first, Nigel’s eyes fluttering shut as he perhaps relived the same memories Aiden had of their first kiss - gentle and tentative, so different from the hungry ones they had shared at the bar. Nigel nipped and nuzzled at his lips for a moment, pressing closer until his own stubble brushed Aiden’s. Nigel stopped at that and Aiden froze.

His stubble hadn’t bothered Nigel last time, in the heat of the moment before his freak out. But now? The potential for hurt or rejection that hung over him in that moment almost had him running.

Nigel pulled back, gazing into Aiden’s eyes, then taking him all in - his lips, his chin, his cheeks… Nigel’s hand left Aiden’s crotch, and smoothed over his lower lip, pulling it down a little. Aiden ran his tongue out to moisten his lips, tasting Nigel’s thumb as his chest heaved breathlessly.

Slowly Nigel’s thumb moved down to his chin, stroking over his stubble. Aiden trembled.

“You always were an angel… my beautiful angel…” Nigel muttered, “I can’t live without you.”

Aiden let out a sharp cry, his bottom lip quivering as he tried to hold back tears.

Nigel leaned in, sliding their cheeks alongside each other and rubbing them together as Aiden shook and gasped.

“I can get used to this… I… you’re so fucking gorgeous. My heart wants you, it always has,” he added with a slight chuckle, “My cock wants you.”

Aiden was barely taking in the words as he tried not to sob. Nigel pulled back enough to find Aiden’s lips again, this time in a deep and hungry kiss.

It was so familiar, the taste, the sensation. His gorgeous husband, who knew exactly how to please him.

Or had at least.

Like a dance they both knew the moves to, it was with practised ease that Nigel moved back from Aiden and took hold of his hips, repositioning him on the sofa so that Aiden was under him when he pressed him down to kiss him again. Aiden moaned into the kiss and wrapped his legs around Nigel’s hips.

“Fuck, gorgeous, you’re… you’re so… I didn’t think I’d… I want you so fucking much...” Nigel’s mouth moved from his to nuzzle against Aiden’s throat - nipping at the stubbled flesh, rubbing his own stubble against it to feel the burn of it, as though familiarising himself with the sensation and clearly not hating it.

“Please, Nigel… fuck me… I need you to… If you… want… Please…” Aiden sobbed in his visceral need to be reclaimed by his husband.

Nigel groaned against Aiden's neck. He held himself for a moment, letting out a shaky breath as though grounding himself. Then he was moving downward as his fingers found the edges of Aiden's shirt and pulled it upwards.

Aiden was trembling again as Nigel pulled his top up and off, dragging it up his arms and dropping it on the floor. From his position between Aiden's legs, Nigel looked down, biting his lower lip as he slowly moved his hands to Aiden's ribs. He placed them either side so that he could gently rub his thumbs over Aiden's nipples.

The light was too dim in the room for Nigel to see much, he certainly wouldn't be able to see the scars. Just the male chest heaving beneath him.

Aiden gasped and shuddered.

"Is this okay?" Nigel asked, hoarse.

Aiden nodded, swallowing hard, his own throat too dry to speak.

The sensation made him shiver, he didn't realise how much feeling he'd now recovered to his chest, or maybe it was just the way Nigel touched him. He arched into Nigel's hands.

"Gorgeous…" Nigel murmured.

A sudden memory flashed to mind, arching against Nigel like this as he played with Gabi's nipples, sucked them into his mouth, muttering 'such perfect tits'.

Aiden's hands flew to Nigel's and pushed them off, panting he lay back on the sofa looking up at Nigel's surprised expression, not hurt. If anything he looked understanding.

"I'm… I'm sorry, I… I never really liked it... before. I knew how much you did so I let you… I let… and now… I don't have what you want…" Aiden chest was tight and his breath was coming short.

"Fuck, angel. Yeah, I loved your… I love your body, whatever it looks like. I loved it then, I love it now. You could grow another fucking head and I'd still love how you look. I'm…" Nigel shook his head, clenching his jaw. "I'm sorry I made you uncomfortable."

Aiden wasn't sure if he meant then or now, but it was enough to have him lightly sobbing again and pulling Nigel down to him. He tasted the salt of his tears as they kissed again, pressed together.

Nigel's right hand snaked slowly up his side, giving him plenty of time to object, though he didn't. Instead he moaned into Nigel's mouth when he rubbed a thumb over his nipple once more.

"Please Nigel… please…" Aiden muttered against his lips.

He could feel Nigel's muscles, how tense they were, how he was restraining himself from just ravaging him. He knew him well enough to remember that - the times he'd just wanted to

fuck and had held back so as not to be rough. And the times he hadn't held back and had fucked him senseless, rough and wonderful.

Nigel shuddered and pulled back again, moving back down the sofa, his fingers making nimble work of undoing Aiden's jeans then pulling them down as he went. His underwear and packer went too, though Aiden wasn't sure whether that was intentional or not. Either way, once Nigel had pulled back enough to discard Aiden's clothes completely, he stilled. Nigel panted as he sat between Aiden's slightly splayed legs, looking down and studying him.

Aiden wanted to cover himself, but only for a split second. For anyone else he would have, but this was Nigel. Nigel who knew him so intimately. Who now stroked his inner thigh as he took in what Aiden had to offer.

"I didn't know what to expect, even with the videos. Everyone is different, so I didn't..." Nigel's words were a low rumble. And then he leaned in, making Aiden jump with surprise as he gently parted Aiden's folds and licked his small cock from root to tip. He nuzzled against his crotch his tongue exploring every new part of Aiden. "Oh angel," Nigel groaned, "you always tasted so good. I could eat you out all day."

Aiden felt a jolt of laughter break through his chest - a delighted and unsupressable bark that shattered into a hysteria for a moment. Aiden moved a hand down into Nigel's hair, gripping his fingers in the familiar locks.

"I always loved your mouth," Aiden hummed and Nigel groaned against him before slipping his tongue inside. "Yes, like that," Aiden hissed. He had always loved Nigel's tongue inside him, he'd always wanted to love more than that, and now maybe he could.

Aiden arched again, letting out a cry of pleasure and tightening his fingers against Nigel's scalp until the man grunted. He surged up, taking Aiden's mouth hungrily, spreading his moisture over Aiden's chin. Aiden groaned and wrapped himself around Nigel as he pressed his denim clad crotch to Aiden's. They rut together for a few minutes before managing to drag themselves apart.

Nigel was panting, visibly shaking, as he pulled back onto his knees and pulled his wallet from his pocket, drawing out a condom packet. "Is this okay, do you… Do you like…"

"Uhuh," It came out as a desperate noise as Aiden started to undo Nigel's jeans, groaning when he finally had his hand around Nigel's straining cock. He pulled it from Nigel's underwear and running his thumb over the head.

Aiden couldn't help a somewhat nervously excited grin, "As good as I remember," he moaned, "God, I want to feel you. I've missed you."

Nigel groaned and took hold of his dick, holding it tight, clearly to stave off orgasm. He took deep, gulping breaths for a moment, his eyes closed tight shut, before finally letting out a long breath. He opened his eyes again and looked at Aiden with such adoration that Aiden didn't know what to do with it. Nigel ripped the packet open with his teeth and rolled the condom onto himself.

“Nigel…” Aiden moaned, reaching his hands out. Nigel went to him, kissing him deeply as he moved his hips, maneuvering himself until he pushed into Aiden’s wet, tight, heat.

They groaned into each other’s mouths as Aiden wrapped his legs up around Nigel’s hips, urging him deeper.

Nigel took the encouragement, sliding slow and deep into Aiden.

Their kiss broke and they just breathed into each other, as Nigel rocked into him.

It was so familiar, so right. It was everything he’d missed and knew no one else could ever provide. No one else could ever love him the way Nigel had. The way Nigel did.

“Angel…” Nigel groaned against his neck, rubbing against his stubble once more as he began to move his hips.

“Don’t be gentle,” Aiden gasped, immediately rewarded with Nigel grunting and fucking into him as he bit at his neck. Aiden gasped for breath as Nigel’s thrusts knocked the air out of his lungs.

He felt the roughness of Nigel’s clothes against his naked body, a strange friction. The feel of Nigel’s pelvis pressed against his own cock, effectively jerking it as he thrust. Wonderful sensations that had been missing and now he felt more complete than he ever realised he could be.

When Aiden was able to catch his breath he sobbed, letting out wet moans and grunts as Nigel fucked him hard into the sofa, pinning him down under the weight and length of his body.

“Nigel… uahhh, unnggg, Ni…” Aiden lost the ability to talk as he climaxed. His little cock throbbing and his inner muscles contracting around Nigel.

“Fuck… Angel… Aiden… I…” Nigel cried out as he came, pushing himself deep over and over as he spilled.

Aiden’s breath hitched and he thought for a moment his heart might beat clear out of his chest.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The Happy Ending.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is primarily smut, for anyone not comfortable reading, please be aware, this chapter includes - hand jobs, oral sex performed on a trans guy including blow job and front hole penetration with tongue, as well as front hole fingering. To avoid you'd have to skip pretty much to the end :3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nigel had wrapped himself around Aiden and held him tight as Aiden cried.

Nigel was still half hard and spent inside him, but he fucking held onto him for all he was worth. He knew these weren't unhappy tears, but they weren't wholly happy either. Aiden likely felt even more keenly than he had started to, the lose of the five years they'd been apart. The relief and release of emotions that this physical reunion had brought them.

He had gentled Aiden for long minutes before slipping out of him and disposing of the condom. He'd returned to find Aiden had pulled a blanket from the back of the sofa around him and was dozing. His face was blotchy with the tears and he was fucking beautiful.

Nigel gathered him up from the sofa and carried him through to the bedroom as he stirred and then clung tightly to Nigel again.

"I'm sorry," Aiden's words came out in a raspy whisper.

"For what darling? There's nothing to be sorry for," He nuzzled the words into Aiden's neck and then set him on the bed.

Aiden quickly pulled back the covers and burrowed in before holding out a hand for Nigel to join him. Nigel shrugged out of his clothes, leaving them in a pile at the side of the bed as he crawled in beside Aiden and snuggled against him in the cool sheets.

"I'm not usually so… I missed you so much. No one… I…" Aiden shook his head, his hair brushing Nigel's face.

“You don’t need to explain gorgeous,” Nigel pressed a kiss to his forehead, “Believe me, I understand.”

“It always felt like I was cheating on you, every time with someone else. All these years,” Aiden sobbed and nuzzled into Nigel’s neck. “It always felt that way because I could never believe that… that we would never have this again. My brain could never compute that it was over. I deep down never accepted it. And now…” Aiden took deep, heavy breaths.

He kissed Aiden’s cheek and then his mouth. It was chaste, but Aiden nuzzled up and returned the kiss. They kissed languidly, exploring and reacquainting as hands stroked over each other.

Nigel’s cock was trying so hard to get back up again, but then Aiden pulled back and snuggled into his chest.

“Will you hold me?” He asked quietly, and Nigel had his arms around him completely before he could even finish the request.

“I’ll never fucking let you go again if you don’t want me to,” Nigel rumbled the words from deep in his chest, his voice breaking a little as his throat constricted at the truth of it.

They fell asleep wrapped around each other.

*

Aiden woke in a position at once familiar and strange.

He was snuggled against a solid mass, cradled in the crook of an arm with his own leg and arm over the body. His hand resting comfortably on a crotch.

This was how he’d woken almost every day with Nigel. It wasn’t always sexual, there was just a weird comfort he took in holding the man’s junk, enjoying the feel of morning wood or soft flesh alike. He’d lost track of the numerous times he’d dreamed of waking like this.

The body next to him snuffled, as though on the verge of waking.

Nigel.

Aiden swallowed hard, wondering if this was actually all a dream.

Last night had been emotional, it had just hit him like a wall. He could only imagine it was like finding someone you loved hadn’t died when you believed they had. It wasn’t something he could easily put into words, and he was glad that Nigel hadn’t asked him to.

Despite the sex and the snuggling, waking next to each other, Aiden had a sudden sense of impropriety. Maybe this was a bit over friendly, a bit too intimate? This wasn’t the past, maybe he shouldn’t be so forward?

He started to withdraw his hand and Nigel stirred, putting his own over the top and holding it there and rub it back and forth as he started to harden a little beneath.

“Hmm,” Nigel hummed his contentment, “I missed waking like this, always liked you keeping my cock warm through the night.” The words rumbled out and connected with every nerve in Aiden’s body.

“I…” Aiden wanted to respond in a way he might have done all those years ago but was unsure whether it was welcome or appropriate. Nigel’s hardening cock told him it might just be fine, all the more so when Nigel began to encourage his hand to start palming him. “I missed your cock,” Aiden finally said, quietly.

Nigel growled at the words and leaned down to kiss him. Aiden opened to him completely, letting the kiss deepen as Nigel’s hands moved and he lay back with them above his head, stretching out and leaving Aiden to continue the languid strokes of his cock. Aiden chased the kiss, moving to half cover Nigel with his own slight form.

“It missed you, darling,” Nigel mumbled, lost to the sensations. It might have sounded like a joke but Nigel was clearly serious as he closed his eyes and bit his lower lip, his breath coming in little puffs. “No one can touch me like you do,” he grunted as Aiden twisted his hand over his cockhead before stroking back down again.

Aiden’s hand worked as if by long remembered muscle memory, knowing exactly what Nigel liked. Where to touch him, how much and when. He watched the cock in his hand responding to each movement, before he looked up to Nigel’s face and was unable to turn away.

Nigel’s expressions spoke of the pleasure Aiden was bringing him, and Aiden wasn’t sure there was a better view in the world in that moment.

He twisted his hand again, speeding up his strokes as he started to pump Nigel’s cock at what he knew of old was the perfect speed, perfect pressure. He moved his other hand to Nigel’s balls, tugging at them oh so gently before palming them.

In response Nigel groaned, arching into Aiden’s touch and groaning, “Fuck, angel. You’re so fucking perfect.”

The words fired up every nerve within Aiden as a mixture of emotions flooded him. Angel was the pet name he’d always had - Nigel’s Angel.

The night before he had said it again and again and Aiden had put it down to the passion of the moment. But now it felt like he really did mean it, did see Aiden as that angel of years before.

Not content to accept this unquestingly, Aiden’s brain threw back a barrage of paranoia.

Nigel’s eyes were closed. Aiden was sure he wouldn’t be the first man to imagine it was someone else jerking them off, or sucking them, or even fucking.

Aiden acted on instinct as he moved down the bed, his one hand still on Nigel’s cock, as he lay next to the man. He leaned in a kissed him, just ghosting their lips against each other before he rubbed his stubble against Nigel’s.

He needed to give that reminder.

This is me, this is Aiden.

He knew the reaction might be bad, maybe more of the gay panic he'd been expecting, or maybe something worse. The response he did get was completely unexpected.

Nigel groaned, his own hand flying to his cock and covering Aiden's, "Do that again darling," Nigel asked, breathlessly.

Aiden did. Rubbing their stubbled cheeks together, nipping at any flesh he could whilst doing so.

Nigel groaned again and started to work his cock faster, Aiden's hand under his as he brought himself to climax in only a few strokes.

His come spurted up the length of his body, falling on his chest and stomach, a small dollop on his throat, which Aiden couldn't resist leaning in to collect on his tongue before moving up to kiss Nigel and share it between them.

There seemed to be one long, continuous, but alternatingly pitched, groan from Nigel from the moment his hand had joined Aiden's to when they broke the kiss.

Nigel lay there, eyes still closed, panting and looking entirely fucked out.

"I just… needed you to know it was me that you were…" Aiden trailed off, unsure why he felt the need to explain.

Nigel opened his eyes, full of adoration and ecstasy.

"I'm not fucking delusional darling, you think anyone else could have made me come that hard? I know who I'm in bed with, and I couldn't be fucking happier about it." Nigel growled the words, part desire and part reprimand.

Aiden nodded, his mouth quirking into a lopsided grin.

"So, you… uh, like my stubble?" Aiden was still grinning even as his bit his lower lip, waiting for a response.

Nigel groaned again and Aiden noticed him squeeze his spent cock.

"I'm not gonna lie. I have no idea whether it's just because it's you or that you've just unlocked some fucking kink I had no clue about, but… fuck." Nigel drew out the vowel of the word. "Darling, you ever want to get me in the mood, you just go right ahead and squish your face to mine."

"Maybe I'll grow a beard," Aiden joked, scrubbing at his jaw.

Nigel shivered, "Terrifyingly, I think I might like that. But I'm going to warn you now, I might not let you ever leave our bed if I do. We're going to lose our jobs because we'll be too

busy fucking," Despite the clear joke in there, Nigel said it with such conviction that Aiden had to laugh.

Nigel's eyes flashed and he pulled Aiden down to him before he knew what was happening. Nigel swallowed the laughter into a kiss as he pulled Aiden on top of him, squishing the come between them.

*

It felt like they'd spent hours kissing by the time Nigel excused himself to the bathroom.

They were both a mess, covered in his come as well as sweat and tears from the night before.

Nigel tried to piss as quickly as humanly possible. It wasn't just that he didn't want to be away from Aiden more than he had to, but there was a niggling fear that Aiden would be gone. Ridiculous considering it was his apartment, but he was terrified that this was all a dream.

How lucky could a man get to be given a second chance at the love of his life? Surely shit like that didn't happen to fuckers like Nigel?

He wasn't about to take it for granted for one minute.

Nigel finished pissing and gave himself a quick clean up before heading back to the bedroom, his heart in his throat as he wondered if that would be the moment he woke up.

But Aiden was there.

Awake and fucking beautiful as he sat on the edge of the bed. His feet flat on the fluffy carpet below as he leaned back on his hands and seemed to be looking into the middle distance, lost in thought.

He was still completely fucking naked and Nigel felt the renewed interest in his cock. At this rate they really were never going to leave the apartment again.

Nigel didn't say anything, just moved catlike to Aiden, coming to stand in front of him. Aiden looked up and smiled, the most fucking beautiful thing Nigel had ever seen. Nigel's jaw tightened and he was breathing heavy. He realised he hadn't returned the smile when Aiden's began to falter and he worried he was fucking up. He just had something on his mind and he was lost to it, and had to just do it before he lost the nerve. They hadn't talked about this, hadn't brought up his previous aversion to oral sex and his crying out for Nigel to suck his cock. Nigel just had to go with instinct, had to put the previous issue down to dysphoria and happily fuck off if he'd called it wrong and Aiden pushed him away.

He fucking hoped Aiden didn't push him away. Not just because he really did want to suck his cock, but because he wanted to have got this right, to have understood what was going on without Aiden having to spell it the fuck out for him.

Nigel wordless dropped to his knees, placing his hands on Aiden's thighs as he did so and spreading them as he went.

Aiden's breath hitched and after a fraction of a second's hesitation he spread his legs willingly, his breath coming in short puffs, each filled with anticipation.

"Fuck," The word came out reverently as Nigel moved his hands over Aiden, spreading him further so he could take in his cock properly, as he hadn't the night before. It was of course smaller than a cis penis, but Nigel knew roughly what to expect from the porn.

He groaned as he watched it harden in front of his eyes, standing a little more erect and swelling slightly.

"Oh god, angel… I… I've wanted to do this for…" Nigel leaned in, burying his face between Aiden's legs to lick from his wet front hole up to the tip of his cock.

Aiden whined and let out a shuddering breath, his whole body trembling under Nigel's touch.

Nigel nosed at his little wet cock for a moment before nuzzling at it.

"Oh fuck," Aiden breathed out the word and fell back on his elbows, his hands apparently no longer able to support him.

"You fucking tell me if I get anything wrong here darling, I want you to feel good," Nigel growled before gently taking Aiden into his mouth. He swirled his tongue around Aiden's cock, earning a soft moan. And then he sucked, pulling back slightly and thinking about how he liked to be sucked off, and how the guys had done it in the videos. He sucked and dropped back down, repeating over and over as he continued to suck Aiden's cock.

Aiden was shaking as he collapsed further, now flat on his back and moaning, writhing even as he tried to stay still enough not to dislodge Nigel.

"Oh fuck… Nigel, fuck…" The words came out almost like a sob and Nigel figured he must be doing something right.

So he hummed, feeling Aiden shudder at the sensation. Yeah, he'd always fucking liked that too, he practically grinned.

"Uhnng, Nigel… Ouhhh," The noises coming from Aiden were fucking filthy and Nigel was fucking rock hard again himself. "You're… fingers… fuck me…" Aiden struggled to get the words out.

Nigel groaned then complied, settling better on his knees so he could press two fingers into Aiden's wet heat and jerk himself off with the other hand.

He wasn't going to fucking last long, he knew that much - had suspected as much from how much he'd got off on the videos. He hoped he could just fucking get it right, so far he seemed to be doing a good job. Aiden was writhing and grunting, panting and moaning, arching into every point of contact.

Nigel couldn't even fucking look, he'd just end up shooting his load.

“Ung so good… more…” Aiden gasped the words and Nigel wasn’t sure what exactly he wanted more of, so he added another finger - thrusting against the spongy little g-spot that was so familiar to him, whilst doubling his attention to Aiden’s cock. He pulled back, flicking his tongue over the head before sinking back down on him.

Nigel pressed his tongue to the underside of Aiden’s cock as he sucked, stroking it as best he could on each draw back, leaving Aiden gasping for breath again.

“Yes..,”Aiden practically screamed, “There… Nigel.. Ughnn...”

Then a moment later Aiden cried out and arched forward, as though his body was going to curl in on itself.

Nigel felt the slight pulsing of Aiden’s cock in his mouth and then the greedy clenching of his inner muscles around his fingers.

It was so fucking hot, Nigel had to stop jerking himself, giving himself a moment before drawing back.He removed his fingers and replaced them with his tongue, pushing into Aiden as he continued to come, before lapping from hole to dick, giving equal attention to every part of him.

He loved that Aiden was still writhing through it, flat on his back once more and making little appreciative noises as he enjoyed the come down from his climax.

Nigel started fisting his cock again, taking only a couple of strokes for him to come into his waiting palm rather than all over the fucking floor or side of the bed.

He grunted into Aiden’s flesh as he did so, nuzzling the base of Aiden’s cock as he rode out his own orgasm.

Nigel stayed there, cheek resting on Aiden’s inner thigh as he panted, trying to come back to himself but every fucking inch of his skin was tingling.

He only revived when he felt movement and then hands in his hair, gently mussing it. Aiden had sat up and was looking down at him with the biggest fucking puppy dog eyes he’d ever seen, his heart skipped a beat.

“Nigel… Fuck,”Aiden chuckled, “that was so good.”

“I’m so fucking happy to hear that darling,” Nigel’s words came out a little slurred, hazy from his orgasm.

Aiden pulled him back gently by the hair so Nigel had to fully look up at him and sit back on his haunches to do so. Aiden leaned in and kissed him, then ran his tongue over his lips, tasting his own wetness there. It was likely all over Nigel’s fucking face, and he couldn’t be happier about it.

Aiden pulled back, still looking at him with total adoration, when something caught his eye. Aiden smirked and nodded towards Nigel’s come filled hand that sat resting palm up on his thigh.

“Didn’t want to make too much fucking mess did I,” Nigel explained.

“You really did get considerate,” Aiden chuckled, leaning in to kiss him again.

*

Aiden was glad of the shower because he was now covered in more bodily fluids than he was sure he could account for, as much as he hated losing Nigel’s scent from his skin.

He had to keep reminding himself that this was the start of something now, not the end. They wouldn’t lose each other again. If Nigel was going to panic and run it would likely have been somewhere between the hand job and the blow job at least.

There wasn't much further they could go that they hadn’t already that could possibly scare him off. Aiden’s mind flipped for a moment to thoughts of anal sex with Nigel, it wasn’t like they hadn't done it before and both enjoyed it. Aiden couldn’t help but wonder if he could get a replay of the blow job but with Nigel’s fingers in his ass instead. The thought made his cock throb and he resisted running his soapy hand down to tease at it.

They couldn’t spend the whole weekend fucking…. Could they?

Again, wouldn’t be the first time.

Aiden’s lips quirked into a smile and he shut off the water.

He was in front of the mirror with a towel around his waist when Nigel appeared behind him.

“You need to use the bathroom?” Aiden asked as he rubbed moisturiser into his face, looking at Nigel in the mirror.

Nigel shook his head and crowded behind him, slipping his arms around Aiden’s waist and nuzzling into this neck. Aiden could feel Nigel was already half hard between his ass cheeks.

“I grabbed some of the pizza, we should eat.”

Aiden smiled. It was weird to be taken care of by Nigel again. It had never felt like a gender thing, never been him providing for his wife, it had always been about the love. The object of Nigel’s love was also the object of his worship and obsession. He would crawl over hot coals to do anything he could.

A kaleidoscope of butterflies took off in Aiden’s belly and had his heart fluttering.

“Gotta keep your strength up, angel,” Nigel murmured against his skin, “if you uh, want to… after we eat, or later? We could watch a movie? But if you want… to…”

Aiden chuckled as he felt Nigel’s cock twitch against his ass.

Aiden turned in Nigel’s arms and tugged at the towel, letting it drop to the floor. He wound his arms up around Nigel’s neck and played his fingers into his hair.

“Are you sure we need to stop for food?” Aiden batted his eyelashes and grew a devious smile.

“Fuck no,” Nigel growled, lifting Aiden easily into his arms and manhandling him back to the bedroom as Aiden laughed.

*****

****

***

**

*

**

***

****

*****

It was the middle of the night Sunday once they’d got as much fucking out of their system as possible - making up for lost time they both kept agreeing. They’d eaten, snuggled whilst watching the end of the abandoned movie. Made out like fucking teenagers before another round of orgasms and then sleep.

Nigel had set his alarm early so he could get back to his place and get ready before heading to work, so when his phone went off in the darkness, he figured that was it. It took him a moment to focus and realise it was ringing. He didn't know the number, but it could be one of the shelters with an emergency involving one of his kids, so he answered cautiously.

Aiden stirred next to him as he answered quietly, “Hello?”

“Hello Nigel,” Nigel hadn’t expected to hear that cold drawl ever again.

“Darko,” He acknowledged and then waited.

He could hear the man sucking his teeth before responding further, “I’ve made a new friend, says he knows you. Randall, nice kid huh?”

Nigel bit back a growl and stopped himself from a knee jerk reaction. One of his kids getting mixed up with Darko was pretty much his worst fucking nightmare.

“Leave him be Darko. He’s just a kid.”

There was a cold chuckle, ended by an inhale that sounded like the draw on a cigarette. Darko exhaled before responding cooly, “Of course brother, I just need one favour from you. For old time’s sake.”

Nigel’s jaw tightened and he felt Aiden’s gentle hand on his shoulder. He turned to see the concerned expression.

He felt like he’d just got his fucking life back without even realising he’d been living in limbo the last five years. He should just tell Darko to fuck off.

But Randall?

Anger burned inside him, and he growled “What do you want?”

Darko chuckled.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you've enjoyed this little story.

These guys will be returning (hopefully not much later in the year) with ~ I Love You ~ in which life (and Darko) will test their newly re-established relationship. Don't worry, there will always be a happy ending!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!